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A Superintendent's Leadership of State-Initiated Reform in a High-Poverty School District in Texas

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A Superintendent's Leadership of State-Initiated Reform in a High-Poverty School District in Texas

by

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Dedication

My life and my work are inseparable. Matthew Fox writes: "Life and livelihood ought not to be separated but to flow from the same source, which is Spirit. Spirit means life, and both life and livelihood are about living in depth, living with meaning, purpose, joy, and a sense of contribution to the greater community" (1994, pp. 1-2).

This work, the culmination of a long-cherished dream, is dedicated to those positive people who have inspired me to live life with purpose and meaning, with great joy, and in service to others. I dedicate this effort to the following: Pete and Margie Schillings, my recently deceased parents, who believed in me and encouraged me to fulfill my dreams; to three great teachers, Dr. Jack Montague, The University of Texas at Austin, Dr. Marvin Smith, Southwest Texas State University, and Dr. Nolan Estes, The University of Texas at Austin, who served as my role models; to my children, Nathan, Chris, and Audrey, and my daughter-in-law, Rochelle, who taught me about love; and to my grandchildren, Madison, Meredith, and Mallory who bring me great joy.

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There is no way to express the appreciation I feel for my family and my circle of friends. Their unwavering love, support and faith in my ability to succeed has sustained me through difficult times and encouraged me to accomplish my goals and dreams.

A Superintendent's Leadership of State-Initiated Reform in a High-Poverty School District in Texas

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The purpose of this research was to examine the superintendent's leadership of state-initiated reform in the context of a high-poverty school district in Texas. Specifically, the study was designed to identify the leadership acts and leadership strategies employed by the superintendent to implement the state accountability system, to increase student performance, and to achieve excellence and equity for all students. Three research questions guided the research process: 1) What are the strategies and leadership acts used by the superintendent to influence change in the district? 2) What is the perceived effectiveness of the superintendent's strategies and leadership acts strategies? 3) How are the strategies and leadership acts linked to student performance?

This study used qualitative methods to examine the strategies and leadership acts of the superintendent of Mariposa ISD. Data for this study were collected through a series of one-on-one interviews, observations, documents, and archival records. The resulting data were coded and emerging categories recognized through Grounded Theory qualitative procedures. The data analysis allowed for the emergence of categories that provided answers to the research questions posed in this study.

Based on the findings of the study, the superintendent used specific leadership acts and strategies to create the organizational conditions receptive to system-wide change and to design an approach to reform that promoted student success. The superintendent's interpretation of the reform policies, along with his assessment of the needs and pressures for change affecting the school district, gave rise to the leadership acts and strategies he employed and formed the targets for the restructuring plan. The superintendent's plan for restructuring included the following components: transforming district culture; a district focus on performance; organizational restructuring of roles, responsibilities, and relationships; decentralization of authority; and systems of accountability. His unique interpretation and implementation of the policies of reform in relation to the culture and context of the school community resulted in system-wide change and brought reform to scale across the entire school district.

The findings of this study enhance our understanding of the superintendent's leadership in contextualized settings and how state-initiated reform policies can be used to leverage change and increase student performance in high-poverty, urban school districts**.**

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

A public demand for better schooling has been the driving force of educational reform for some time. For nearly a century policymakers, reformers, and practitioners have searched for viable solutions and tools to connect policy and practice in the public schools, focusing variously on the clients, resources, and processes of schooling but not on its outcomes (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Clune, 1990; DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Since the early 1980s public debate and political attention to reform has intensified, centering on issues of educational accountability, with a primary focus on student performance outcomes as the means to promote excellence and to mitigate the impact of poverty in America's schools (Elmore, Abelmann, & Fuhrman, 1996; Reeves, 2004). Seeking tangible evidence that schools were focused on teaching and learning, policymakers have used high-stakes testing and other measures of effectiveness to assess academic performance, shifting attention from the district to the school as the unit of accountability (Elmore, 2002; Fuhrman, 1999). Educational literature written over the last two decades described numerous stories of remarkable success in individual campuses where all students, regardless of race or family income, succeed academically. Despite the achievements of these outstanding exemplars, reform efforts in general have failed to propogate effective teaching practices to large numbers of schools and classrooms or across entire school districts (Elmore, 1995; Elmore, 1996; Fullan, 2001; Stringfield & Datnow, 1998). What is needed today are entire school

districts and states in which all schools, not just isolated campuses, become places where children of color and poverty experience the same school success that most white children and children from middle- and upper-income families have always enjoyed (Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000).

A moral imperative to create equity and excellence in educational opportunities for all children stimulated a new era of federal intervention into local school improvement in the early 1980s. In 1983, ignited by the National Commission on Excellence in Education's watershed report, *A Nation at Risk,* which focused on a growing educational crisis of poor academic performance, high dropout rate, declining quality and morale of the teaching force, as well as weak and uncoordinated curriculum, states redoubled their efforts to improve school performance (Fullan, 2001). The Commission presented America with the following message: education is declining, education is important in order to create and sustain a prepared work force, and schools must be held accountable for improvement (Adams & Kirst, 1999). In addition to recommendations regarding curriculum, high expectations for all students, and rigorous performance standards, the report called for improved methods and strategies to ensure educational excellence and to hold educators responsible for school success.

Following the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the nation shifted its attention from the processes and management of schooling to a focus on performance outcomes. A new notion of educational accountability, which measured school success in terms of student performance, offered policy makers at the national and

state levels, government and business leaders, professionals, and parents a new reform strategy, one that used accountability as a lever to drive educational change (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Elmore, 2002; Fuhrman, 1999).

The "new" accountability, enshrined in federal law since the mid-1990s and the focus of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, President George W. Bush's reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, centered around the use of rigorous content standards and accountability mechanisms to assure continuous improvement of student performance for all children and to eliminate achievement gaps among student population groups (Rebora, 2004). To accomplish these ends, the law required each state to submit accountability plans for approval, to sanction heavily those schools that do not show adequate yearly progress, and to ensure that all students are taught by highly qualified teachers (Center for Education Policy, 2003). Although the *No Child Left Behind Act* expanded the role of federal government to intervene in state and local control over education, the states will retain exclusive authority to determine the content of the accountability plans (Reeves, 2004).

Among the policy mandates surrounding educational accountability systems in the last decade was a focus on restructuring the roles and responsibilities of the school organization to decentralize the locus of authority for school management and goal setting from the central office to the school site, increasing accountability for school improvement to those who were in closest proximity to the student. The premise for school or site-based management (SBM) was that school performance would improve when teachers and school

administrators were empowered to set the direction for school success and to take responsibility for the effectiveness of their operations (Hill & Bonan, 1991; Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990).

Despite the fact that research validating the success of SBM as an isolated strategy has been negligible, policy makers and district leaders maintain commitment to decentralization as a component solution to school improvement and accountability (Bryk et al., 1998; Elmore, 2002; Hill & Celio, 1998; Reeves, 2004). According to Bryk et al. (1998), effective districts have restructured their central organizations using decentralized development within the context of capacity-building and external accountability. As issues and conflicts related to SBM have arisen, district leaders have continued to search for coordinated strategies to support the success of SBM in their school districts and to assist campus leadership and site-based teams in their efforts to effectively engage all stakeholders in decision-making processes (Bryk et al., 1998).

As the complexities and issues related to the new accountability framework for school improvement have unfolded, policy discussion has become centered on the issues of leadership, capacity building, and creating coherent structures of external and internal accountability systems (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Barber, 2000; Elmore, 2002; Fullan, 2001). It falls to leadership to create the conditions and the environment for policy to succeed. To support the implementation of wide scale reform, leadership is needed to establish vision, purpose, and shared meaning as a precondition for change (Fullan, 2001). Building capacity for restructuring also requires strong leadership to guide the

development of a highly skilled community of professionals who are prepared to raise the standard for teaching within the profession (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999), to embrace new roles and relationships in restructured settings, to engage in the collaborative processes of site-based decision-making (Bryk et al., 1998; Hill & Celio, 1998; House, 2000), and to support increased accountability for student performance. Further, it falls to leadership to reconcile external and internal accountability concepts and formulate coherent local policies to align internal and external standards (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Fuhrman, 1999).

While the processes and the complexities of educational change are little understood by many of those who are affected by it or by those who are expected to implement it, almost everyone understands that there are continuous and competing demands on schools for change and improvement. It appears that policymakers, parents, and politicians will continue to demand increasingly higher levels of performance and more conceptually demanding curriculum by schools and educators in order to prepare students for success in a rapidly evolving, technologically complex, diverse global society (Elmore, 1995; Fuhrman, 1999; Murname & Levy, 1996; Schlechty, 2001; Vinovskis, 1996).

If educational organizations are to survive, they must be responsive to change. The price of stability in today's world is decay. The challenge of leading in an era of change and reform requires a new form of leadership, one that helps organizations learn and adapt to an environment of rapidly accelerating change (Senge, 1990). Burns (1978) defined this style of leadership as transformational leadership. According to Leithwood (1994), transformational leadership is an

appropriate strategy for reforming organizations because "leadership only manifests itself in the context of change, and the nature of that change is a crucial determiner of the forms of leadership that will prove to be beneficial" (p. 499).

A central function of leadership is to transform the organization itself – its very culture – into high performing learning communities (Elmore, 2000). The leader must have the skills to shape followers' goals and values toward a collective purpose in the active pursuit of higher educational goals (Burns, 1978). One means used by district leaders to establish a unified purpose is to establish norms for collaboration and continuous improvement. Collaboration is critical to developing a sense of professionalism and commitment to shared goals, resulting in improved school performance (Fullan, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Lambert, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1994). In professional learning communities, people are engaged in a process of continuous improvement, renewal, and organizational learning (Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1994).

Leaders foster the renewal process by tapping human potential and unleashing the talent and energy that dwell within its membership (Gardner, 1990). Nothing is more vital to renewal than the system by which people are nurtured and moved into positions where they can make meaningful contributions to the organization (Gardner, 1990). Transformational leaders are those who are able to transform the vision and goals of an organization into an action plan that mobilizes individuals to act and to reshape the entire organization (Tichy & Devanna, 1990).

The skills required to lead learning organizations have taken on a relational slant, the human side of leadership. Leaders use leadership versus management skills to involve and align stakeholders, to motivate and inspire, to evoke followership, and to empower others to act (Kotter, 1996; Wheatley, 1992). Efforts to effect change must always include good management and attention to tasks, but in order to lead change and to motivate people, leaders must be concerned with the people of the organization and attend to their relationships (Wheatley, 1992).

Organizations that improve do so because leaders create and nurture agreement on what is worth achieving and set in motion the internal processes by which people learn how to do what is needed "to achieve what is worthwhile" (Elmore, 2000, p. 25). A strategy or initiative that works in one organization may be inadequate to provide appropriate solutions in another because change is contextual and must be reconfigured and redesigned in every setting. "Improvement is a function of learning to do the right thing in the setting where you work" (Elmore, 2000, p. 26).

In schools, the successful initiation of change rarely occurs without an advocate, and the most powerful one in the school district is the superintendent, especially when working in concert with the school board and state-mandated policy (Fullan, 2001; Huberman & Miles, 1984; LaRoque & Coleman, 1989; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). Although individual teachers and single schools can bring about change without the support of central administration, bringing change to scale across entire districts will not

happen without the support of district leadership (Fullan, 2001). Field studies of district improvement efforts such as Bryk and associate's (1998) study of the Chicago school system and Elmore and Burney's (1999) study of District 2 in New York City have demonstrated that the superintendent and central office administrators were sources of information, support, and advocacy in district improvement efforts, using policies, planning, and district resources to gain district wide commitment to improvement initiatives.

Superintendents are in a unique position in the environment of reform. In the midst of this politically charged environment, school superintendents serve as the fulcrum between the external pressures of state-mandated policy and the internal environments of their school districts (Wills & Petersen, 1995). As chief executive officer, the superintendent plays a critical role in the restructuring process (Holdaway & Genge, 1995). He or she assesses the organizational need for change, markets a compelling vision to the school community, interprets the reform agenda, selects implementation strategies that are aligned with the context, culture, and values of the school community (Fullan, 2001; Johnson, 1996), creates access to human and fiscal resources to support a change, and provides leadership to the district in negotiating the hazardous journey of change (Leithwood, 1995; Musella, 1995). It is also the superintendent's task to increase the basic capacity of the system to manage change effectively (Fullan, 2001).

Superintendents lead in a nexus of external demands from state legislatures, regulatory agencies, and local constituencies (Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1989; Wills & Peterson, 1995). The manner in which they choose to lead,

their leadership practice, is largely determined by their interpretation of the three spheres of influence that intersect at the office of the school superintendent: the external environment, the internal processes of the superintendent, and the context of the local school district. It is further influenced by the extraordinarily hard-to-change regularities of schooling and the particularities of the culture that exists in the environment of their local district (Johnson, 1996; Leithwood, 1995).

Leaders must respond to the environment when it makes focused demands. In the policy environment of state-initiated reform, superintendents are mandated to respond to pressure for accountability and increased student performance with strategies to improve their school districts (Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1989). By virtue of their positional authority in school systems, superintendents serve as gatekeepers to either facilitate or inhibit the flow of information and resources within their districts. Wills and Peterson (1995) assert that "superintendents are key environmental scanners, interpreters, and reactors in the face of state initiated reforms" (p. 88). Superintendents'interpretations of policies in relation to the context of their districts shape their responses to reform and the implementation processes they initiate (Wills & Peterson, 1995). How these perceptions and interpretations shape superintendents' responses to reform is a key to understanding the manner and quality of policy implementation.

Description of the Study

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to examine the superintendent's leadership of state-initiated reform in the context of a high poverty school district

in Texas. Specifically, this study was designed to identify the leadership strategies and leadership acts employed by the superintendent to implement the state accountability system, to increase student performance throughout the district, and to achieve excellence and equity for all students. According to Firestone (1989), important insights into the successful implementation of reforms can be discovered by examining the superintendent's leadership strategies used to initiate, implement, and sustain reforms in a school district context.

Recently, the opportunity to study examples of district-wide academic success for all students, including minority and economically disadvantaged children, has arisen in states such as Texas, North Carolina, Connecticut, and New York. These states have highly developed and stable educational accountability systems which make it possible to identify districts with clusters of high-poverty schools achieving at high levels of academic success (Elmore & Burney 1999; Grissmer & Flanagan, 1998; Jerald, 2000; Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Skyrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). Case studies of a few of these high-performing districts revealed evidence that wide-scale academic success can be linked to the manner in which reform policies were implemented and sustained by district level leadership (Bryk et al., 1998; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000) rather than to the policies themselves.

Despite the fact that district effectiveness studies are beginning to appear more frequently in the literature, little research has been conducted to specifically investigate how the superintendent leads the implementation of reform, especially in the context of high-performing, high-poverty school districts (Coleman &

LaRoque, 1990; Johnson, 1996; Reeves, 2004; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). In the past, school effectiveness literature has tended to focus on the school as the unit of change and the leadership of the principal as the primary agent of change (Cawelti, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Ferguson, 1998; Fullan, 1991; Musella, 1995; Reyes & Scribner, 1996**).** Using the school as the unit of change without considering the sources of change and support from the district fails to acknowledge the relationship that must exist between schools and district level leadership, particularly the leadership of the superintendent, for school improvement to occur (Bryk et al., 1998; Elmore, 2000; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Fullan, 2001; Huberman & Miles, 1984; Lambert, 2003; LaRoque & Coleman, 1989; Johnson, 1996). According to Fullan (1991), the district superintendent is "the single most important individual for setting the expectations and tone of the pattern of change within the local district" (p. 191).

In this study, the strategies and leadership acts used by the superintendent to initiate, implement, and assess reform efforts were examined. Additionally, the study examined the degree to which the strategies and leadership acts of the superintendent were perceived by teachers, parents, and administrators to be effective. Finally, the study investigated the effects of the superintendent's strategies and leadership acts on student achievement.

Early analysis of the first year of implementation of the ambitious *No Child Left Behind Act* illuminate both the promise and the challenge facing district, state, and national educators and policymakers as they strive to achieve the moral purpose and spirit of the legislation to raise student achievement and, at

the same time, to interpret, develop, and implement accountability plans that address the complex issues and technical dilemmas revealed in initial implementation (Center for Education Policy, 2003; Elmore, 2002; Fuhrman, 1999; Popham, 2003).

Considering the far-reaching implications of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation that mandates broad-scale accountability for all schools and school districts in the nation, sharing compelling examples of school district success in bringing reform to scale may allow for transferability and replicability to support change in similar contexts. The findings from this study will broaden the knowledge base about successful implementation of state-initiated reform. Finally, the information may prove useful to district leaders who are searching for solutions and strategies to improve student performance through the implementation of state and federal reform policies.

Research Questions

Several questions directed the form and content of this study. The research questions were as follow:

1. What are the strategies and leadership acts used by the superintendent to influence change in the district?
2. What is the perceived effectiveness of the superintendent's strategies and leadership acts?
3. How are the strategies and leadership acts linked to student performance?

Design of the Study

The research design of this study was qualitative and emergent, using grounded theory methodology and a single case study design. A case study design was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved in the study (Merriam, 1988). The study design is consistent with Merriam's (1988) description of the five characteristics of qualitative research.

Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology consisting of a systematic set of procedures that is grounded in the data to inductively develop substantive theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The purpose of grounded theory is to build theory that is faithful to and which illuminates the area under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Definition of Terms

A variety of terms were used throughout this study that hold specific meaning in the research literature. The terms and their operational definitions are as follow:

Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS): the primary data management vehicle used by the state of Texas to report campus and district performance data through specific indicators of performance such as the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), annual drop out rate, and attendance rate. In addition to student performance data, the AEIS provides extensive information on school and district staff, finances, and demographics. The primary purpose of the AEIS is to ensure accountability and recognition of performance.

Accountability: a restructuring strategy that emphasizes measures of student performance as criteria for school responsibility and accountability; the creation of technical approaches for evaluating schools.

Culture: the basic assumptions and beliefs shared by members of a group or organization. The assumptions and beliefs involve the group's view of the world and their place in it, the nature of time and space, human nature, and human relationships (Schein, 1992).

Decentralization: the devolution of control by the central office; schools become deregulated from the district office and are given more authority and responsibility for their own affairs (Johnson, 1990; Lindquist & Mauriel, 1989).

District level leadership: those line positions above the principal up to and including the superintendent (Fullan, 1991, 2001).

Educational change: the process of altering the structures, practices, or programs employed within an organization in order to accomplish goals more effectively (Fullan, 2001).

Educational reform: the planned efforts to improve schools, classrooms, and school districts in order to correct perceived social and educational problems and to improve the life chances for students (Fullan, 2001; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Influence: the ability to affect the perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors of others (Moorhead & Griffin, 1995).

Innovation: a new practice (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Leadership acts: a category or group of related strategies employed by leaders for the purpose of obtaining a desired outcome (Foster, 1986).

Master: the agent who represents the State of Texas in the most extreme sanction against a public school district, short of disestablishing the district or withholding state funds. The master temporarily holds complete and total responsibility for the management and governance of the public school district and works with the superintendent of the district and the school board. This represents a takeover of the school district by the state and is patterned after intervention strategies found in the business arena (Wild, 1995).

Norm: the way we do things around here (Deal & Kennedy, 1982).

Pedagogy: teaching strategies and assessment (Fullan, 1993).

Restructuring: major changes in roles, relationships, and rules to obtain new results in schools and school districts (Corbett, 1990). Cuban (1988) calls restructuring "second-order change" (p. 342) that transforms the school's old ways of doing things into new ways that will solve problems.

Site-based management (SBM): a system of administrative decentralization designed to give schools more power over budget, personnel, and curriculum. It involves restructuring the decision-making processes in districts and schools in order to move the locus and distribution of authority and power into the hands of those who are closest to the students (Clune, 1990).

Strategy: a broad category or group of related tactics for the purpose of obtaining one's preferred outcome (Owen, 1997).

Systemic reform: reform that strives to change education as a system, working for coherence across component policies of curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Lusi, 1994).

Teacher empowerment: an effort to give teachers a greater role in educational decision-making through an assortment of organizational changes (Clune, 1990).

Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS): A criterion referenced assessment for measuring student performance in reading and mathematics in grades 3-8, and 10. Additionally, writing was assessed in grades 4 and 8, and science and social studies in grades 8. The TAAS was part of the state-initiated integrated accountability system used between 1994-2002.

Transformational leadership: the set of abilities that allow the leaders to reorganize the need for change, to create a vision to guide that change, and to execute that change effectively (Moorhead & Griffin, 1995).

Vision: a leadership strategy that involves managing attention in organizations through the creation of an image, or a mental picture of beliefs about what the organization can become.

Limitations of the study

The design of the study constituted a single case study utilizing a qualitative research approach. As such, it was not concerned with supporting hypotheses but, rather, with generating hypotheses and building theory, based on a study of one superintendent in only one school district. In Chapter Three, the advantages and strengths associated with a qualitative research methodology are

described; however, the limitations associated with this study require acknowledgement at this time.

The district and schools were selected in non-random fashion. The district included in the study was selected to represent a high-performing, high-poverty, and high-minority school district in which dramatic gains in student achievement occurred over a six-year period in spite of demographic data revealing the following: more than 90% of the district's student population was minority and 70% of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. In 1993, seven schools in the study district were rated "low-performing" and 42 schools were rated "acceptable" on the state's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). By the year 1998, in spite of increased passing rates, forty-four schools held either a "recognized or "exemplary" rating, no school was designated "low-performing," and the district held a "recognized" rating. Due to the high performance ratings of virtually all the district schools, schools were selected non-randomly based on voluntary participation by the school principal.

Although interpretations were based on comprehensive data from the district, generalizability is limited to the context in which this study takes place. The local context will be described and clarified in Chapter Four so that individuals may assess the generalizability of the data to other contexts.

Delimitations of the Study

Immegart (1988) recommended, "given the need to expand the aspects, dimensions, and variables of leadership studied, to account more fully for leadership's complexity, to examine actual leadership situations, and to expand

conceptualizations, case study and analysis seem potentially useful" (p. 274). Examining leadership through a case study design offers researchers the opportunity to examine the multi-dimensionality of experiences and influences encountered by school district leaders within the context and culture of their districts and to gain a broader, integrated understanding of the superintendent's leadership behaviors (Immegart, 1988; Leithwood, 1995; Musella, 1995).

The unit of analysis for this case study was one superintendent of a large urban Texas school district. This case study focused only on the leadership acts and leadership strategies used by the school superintendent to implement state-initiated educational reform in a high poverty urban school district. The intent of the study was to determine the leadership acts and strategies used by the superintendent that may have contributed to the district's reform efforts and overall school improvement outcomes. It is a study that was based on the perceptions of the participants and the researcher as human instrument for in-depth interviewing and data analysis.

This case study focused on the leadership acts of the superintendent of one large urban school district and, as such, was limited by the characteristics of the specific context in which the study took place. The particular response of the superintendent to the conditions in the school community and to the policy environment of the state-initiated accountability system were determined to be critical to the transformation of this particular school district. The findings provided only a small glimpse of the multiple contexts and possible variations of district leadership in environments of accountability and reform.

Significance of the Study

There are a number of gaps in the literature that lend support to the significance of this study. Skyrla, Scheurich, & Johnson (2000) noted that research describing the successful implementation of large-scale system-wide change is sparse. While district effectiveness studies have recently begun to appear in the literature, research concerning high-achieving school districts is far less abundant than studies of high-performing schools (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001).

There is a virtual absence of reported data on how district leaders, particularly the superintendent, successfully engage their organizations in fundamental reforms (Johnson, 1996). Despite the pivotal role the superintendent plays in interpreting, leveraging, and implementing reform, little attention has been directed to the influence of district leadership, in particular that of the superintendent (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Holdaway & Genge, 1995; Johnson, 1996; Leithwood, 1995) in creating a high-achieving school district. Rather, concentration upon the local school site and the principal's leadership dominates the research (Cuban, 1984; Leithwood, 1995). This implicitly ignores the role that superintendents play in mobilizing limited resources, giving legitimacy to a reform effort, and in negotiating the crucial interplay between central office and the school site that can spell the difference between implementation success and failure. As the urgency for broad-scale accountability increases and as state policy makers and superintendents attempt to meet the requirements under *No*

Child Left Behind, more exemplars are needed of district leadership strategies used to bring reform to scale across entire school districts.

While the patterns of superintendent leadership behavior identified in one case study may not be generalized to other settings, the results of this qualitative research can provide information to broaden the understandings that lead to an integrated theory of superintendent leadership in an environment of educational accountability and reform. Additionally, the study will serve to describe the leadership strategies used by the superintendent to influence the student achievement of a high-poverty school district, offering district leaders clues about the role the superintendent plays in improving student performance.

Some of the variability in the performance of school districts might be attributed to the design, implementation, and acceptance problems associated with the development of a new educational accountability system (Adams & Kirst, 1999). The understandings gained through this study will support future efforts to design accountability systems to build capacity for successful reform efforts at the level of the local school district. Finally, the insights gained from this study may prove useful to both superintendents and other district leaders and to students of educational administration who are preparing for administrative positions.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter One, the research was introduced and the stage set for the study of the superintendents' leadership of state-initiated reform in a high-poverty, high-performing school district. The chapter included an introduction to the study, a description of the study the research questions being investigated, and the

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature

Introduction

The current emphasis in the United States on educational accountability and state-initiated reform intensifies the need to understand the forces shaping implementation of policy mandates at the district level. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of the superintendent's leadership on the implementation of state-initiated reform in the context of a high-poverty school district in Texas. In order to prepare for the study, an investigation of related literature was conducted. Four bodies of literature were examined: leadership theory, organizational change, the history of educational reform, and the superintendent's leadership of reform. The review of the literature in these areas of work provided information and background for the study.

Leadership Theory

A study of the superintendent's leadership of reform may logically include a discussion of the theory surrounding leadership. In consulting the literature, the discussion is complicated by the broad range of conflicting views and evolving interpretations over time about what leadership is and who can exercise it. While there are many definitions of leadership, all appear to share the following commonalities (Immegart, 1988; Johnson, 1996): 1) leadership is a process of influencing others; 2) leadership involves at least two people, the leader and the led; and 3) leadership occurs even when implied or uncommon goals are established.

Among the litany of leadership definitions, one by Moorhead and Griffin (1995) is frequently used: "Leadership is both a process and a property. As a process, leadership is the use of non-coercive influence to direct and coordinate the activities of group members toward goal accomplishment. As a property, leadership is the set of characteristics attributed to those who are perceived to use such influence successfully" (p. 297). Another definition offered by Margaret Wheatley (1992, p. 133) describes leadership as a behavior: "The leader's task is to communicate guiding visions, strong values, organizational beliefs, to keep them ever-present and clear, and then allow individuals in the system their random, sometimes chaotic-looking meanderings." These two widely divergent definitions represent the nature of the controversy in the literature on leadership. An observation by Bennis summarizes the problem (1959, p. 259): "Always, it seems, the concept of leadership eludes us or turns up in another form to taunt us again with its slipperiness and complexity. So we have invented an endless proliferation of terms to deal with it…and still the concept is not sufficiently defined."

Just as there are many definitions of leadership, there are also many approaches to the manner in which the elusive phenomenon of leadership can be organized. One organizing framework is the classification system described by Yukl (1989). This framework organizes the subject of leadership into five major lines of research: trait approach, behavior approach, power-influence approach, situational approach, and integrative approaches.

Studies that investigated the traits of leadership were primarily concerned with "identifying traits, behaviors, and personality patterns that would differentiate leaders from non-leaders" (Fiedler, 1996, p. 241). Stogdill's analysis of the trait approach indicated that while most of the traits studied were related to leadership, none was sufficiently universal "to provide an explanation of leadership emergence or to predict who might become a leader" (Chemers, 1997, p. 20). The behavior theories of leadership focused on two dimensions of leadership: the extent to which leadership is related to task or goal attainment and the extent to which leadership is related to building relationships with employees. Behavior studies attempted to compare the behaviors of effective and ineffective leaders.

Power-influence research examined the influence processes between leaders and followers. Similar to the trait and behavioral approaches, the power-influence approach tended to assume that causality was unidirectional – "leaders act and followers react" (Yukl, 1989, p. 9). This research attempted to describe leadership effectiveness in terms of the amount of power possessed by the leader and the manner in which power was exercised.

Situational or contingency approaches attempted to identify aspects of the situation that moderate the relationship of leadership behaviors to leadership effectiveness (Yukl, 1989). Situational research, beginning with Fiedler's Contingency (1967) model of leadership, led to second generation contingency theories including House's Path-Goal theory (1971) and Vroom and Yetton's normative decision model (1973). This research found that the relationship

between a leader's behavior and the group's performance was dependent upon factors specific to the aspect of the leadership situation (Chemers, 1997).

Fiedler's (1967) work in the area of situational or contingency studies advanced the notion that effective leadership, as measured through the productivity of the organization, was a function of how well the leader's learned behavior patterns matched the demands of a given situation. He concluded that one should not speak of effective or ineffective leadership, but, rather, leadership that is appropriate for the context. These findings challenged the notion that there was one way to lead and supported the likelihood that an effective superintendent would select leadership practices and strategies that were appropriate to the context and specific to the characteristics of his or her own district (Owen, 1997).

According to Burns (1978), all of the above four approaches to leadership were transactional in nature. Burns defined transactional leadership as being based on exchange theory. The transactional leader, for example, accomplishes tasks by establishing standards and expectations for teacher or principal performance and by providing rewards or incentives to those who achieve organizational goals. According to transactional theory, the staff member's motivation and confidence is increased through this exchange of services and rewards. Transactional leaders were characterized as task oriented and focused on managing the smooth operations of existing programs, rather than on initiating organizational change (Leithwood, 1995). Kotter (1996) described management as a set of processes that keep organizations running smoothly. These processes

included planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling, and problem solving (p. 25).

Bass (1985) built on Burns' theory by adding that a transactional leader clarifies the goals of the organization, recognizes the followers' needs, and sets the standards for how these needs will be fulfilled through satisfactory performance. Bass (1985) believed that transactional leadership practices were necessary to maintain the organization but insufficient to motivate people to perform at higher levels of performance or to engage in the processes of profound organizational change such as the development of collaborative professional learning communities in schools. Burns (1978) believed that followers in a transactional relationship were missing an important ingredient – that of enduring purpose. He maintained that without a greater purpose beyond the transaction, the relationship between leader and follower loses significance and must be renegotiated in each transaction, contributing to the loss of momentum in an organization.

Leithwood (1995) points to the lack of an integrated theory of leadership in understanding the complexities of school district leadership in the context of reform and accountability (Foster, 1986; Ogawa, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1992; Yukl, 1989). In summarizing the discussion of leadership theory and applying it to the educational setting, the body of research related to leadership, although contributing substantial and important insights, has not succeeded in documenting the impact of leadership on the performance of schools. Nor has it produced a consensus of opinion on what leadership is and how it works (Immegart, 1988).

Immegart's (1988) meta-analysis of the study of leadership and leadership behavior concluded that "there is an over-reliance on looking backward and the extensive use of reputational data," resulting in a conceptualization that is "atheoretical and aconceptual" (p. 277). The focus of most past efforts in the existing research is an attempt to theorize about leadership rather than to develop conceptualizations of leadership (Immegart, 1988). While there is some support for the situational and trait approaches to leadership, the contextual influences have not been given adequate consideration nor tied back to existing theory in the prominent leadership literature.

Among the contemporary leadership theories that offer opinions about preferred leadership practices, transformational leadership theory has been applied successfully in a few studies to understand the work of exceptional superintendents in an environment of reform and change (Elmore & Burney, 1999; LaRoque & Coleman, 1989; Musella, 1995; Powers, 1985; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). Transformational leadership theory, proposed by Burns (1978), has subsequently been extended by Bass (1985), as well as others in noneducational settings (Podsakoff et al., 1984; Podsakoff et al., 1990). Efforts to apply this theory in educational settings are limited and have been largely focused on school-level leaders (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1991; Sashkin & Sashkin, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1990).

Transformational leadership actually encompasses two sets of leadership practices, one referred to as "transactional" and the other set as "transformational," both of which are necessary to sustain the organization.

While transactional practices approximate the management function of leadership, transformational leadership refers to a set of processes that is used to create organizations or adapt them to significantly changing circumstances (Kotter, 1996). Moorhead & Griffin (1995) defined transformational leadership as a set of abilities that allows the leader to recognize the need for change, to create a vision to guide the change, and to execute that change effectively. After a vision of change is established, Tichy & Devanna (1990) compared the transformational leader to a social architect who uses the tools of social relations and structures to design a new organization (Tichy & Devanna, 1990). According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in a way that both leader and follower are elevated to higher levels of motivation, commitment, and purpose. Transformational leadership shapes followers' goals and values to achieve a collective purpose in the organization.

Transformational leadership is needed to help organizations adapt to the challenging environment of rapidly accelerating change. If organizations are to survive, Senge (1990) suggested that they must be transformed into learning organizations, "a consummately adaptive enterprise," which seek to engage employees in a continuous process of organizational learning, renewal, and improvement (p.53).

Leaders must foster the renewal process. Rather than accepting the status quo and managing to maintain stability, leaders are change agents who continuously "challenge the process" and invent visions of new possibilities to revitalize their organizations (Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Tichy & Devanna, 1990).

According to Gardner (1990), "Transactional leadership works in the structure as it is. Transformational leadership renews" (p. 122). Traditional models of bureaucratic leadership, in which someone at the top thinks for the entire organization, tend to be static and conservative, permitting little room for variation and experimentation. In transformed organizations, authority is dispersed, and thinking and acting is integrated at all levels of the organization (Senge, 1990). Leadership that is shared and collaborative encourages innovation and adaptation, bringing new ideas or solutions into use and making reform possible (Johnson, 1996; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Further, shared leadership is a process for making meaning through which members of an organization develop and endorse approaches to action that are consistent with their organizational culture.

Leadership roles in learning organizations are those of "designer, teacher, and steward" (Senge, 1990, p. 54). These roles require new skills of leaders: the ability to create shared vision, to challenge prevailing mental models, to foster strategic thinking, and to promote relationships. The leader, then, focuses not only on tasks and functions, but on facilitating and organizing processes and relationships within the organization. According to Wheatley (1992), power in organizations is the capacity generated by relationships. The leaders of learning organizations are responsible for building organizations where people are continually expanding their capabilities to shape their own futures (Senge, 1990).

Dimensions of Transformational Leadership

Six dimensions, or competencies, of transformational leadership, adapted to the leadership of the superintendent, are recurring themes in the literature related to educational reform (Bennis, 1984; Burns, 1978; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Podsakoff et al., 1990; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1992). The dimensions of transformational leadership adapted to research about the superintendent are as follows (Podsakoff et al., 1990):

Identifying and articulating a vision

Visions are about possibilities and desired outcomes in organizations. They represent ideals and standards of excellence. As such, they are expressions of optimism and hope (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). According to Bennis and Nanus (1985, p.89), "Vision is a target that beckons." It is important because it creates an image in everyone's mind of the attainable, future state of the organization. Vision infuses meaning and purpose into the workplace and, according to Sergiovanni (1990), establishes the basis for a covenant of values that connects people to purposes and to each other through shared commitments.

While visions are seldom the product of a single individual, educational leaders are responsible for crafting and articulating the vision in a way that affirms what the organization should stand for – its purpose, core values, and a sense of how the parts all fit together (Barth, 1990). Described by Bennis (1984, p. 112) as "management of attention," this leadership behavior is used by effective superintendents to set the direction for district change, and to inspire or

energize others with his or her vision of the future (Leithwood, 1995; Senge, 1990).

Establishing a shared vision is a fundamental step toward the accomplishment of organizational goals. According to Lambert (2003), “A shared vision is the touchstone from which other district actions flow, resulting in program coherence and congruent behaviors”(p. 86). Common visions create shared meanings and inspire shared commitments over time (Schlechty, 2001). By building a shared vision of the organization and telling the truth about its “current reality,” the superintendent can create a tension within the organization to move the current reality toward the vision (Senge, 1990, p. 54). An extraordinary challenge for transformational leadership is to build collective vision and organizational purpose that honors the visions of others and maintains fidelity to the leader’s personal vision.

A superintendent's vision for reform will do little to promote change unless the school community (parents, teachers, administrators, and community members) understand it, believe that it is meaningful, and know what it implies for them (Spillane & Thompson, 1997). The degree of "fit" among the superintendent's vision for reform, the improvement strategy, the school culture, and the schools' capacity to implement the vision are factors that influence and predict the success or failure of the reform initiative (Spillane & Thompson, 1997).

Providing an appropriate model

Leaders intentionally model behaviors designed to set an example for organizational members to follow and that are consistent with the values espoused by the leader (Fullan, 2001; Holdaway & Genge, 1995; Musella, 1995). Johnson (1996) concludes that superintendents must be "teachers" in three domains of leadership — educational, political, and managerial — modeling, coaching, and building the capacity of principals, teachers, and others. Superintendents model their expectations and priorities by articulating their beliefs and values to school staff and parents, and by using direct statements to principals and teachers to communicate district expectations for job performance. For example, superintendents model a district focus on instruction and student performance by bringing the district's attention back to the importance of learning at every opportunity (Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000).

Superintendents may also influence successful implementation of reform initiatives by demonstration of their support for the innovation. Previous studies indicate that before embracing a new reform initiative, staff members look for signals from the superintendent and other district leaders for demonstrations of advocacy and support (Fullan, 2001). Bryk and associates (1998) found that central office support can take the form of material and human resources, training, or greater authority through a focus on capacity-building within the school. Finally, highly effective superintendents demonstrate their commitment to a focus on learning and instruction through visible actions and symbolic behaviors such

as walkthroughs and school visits (Bryk et al., 1998; Corbett & Wilson, 1992; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Fink & Resnick, 1999; House, 2000).

Fostering the acceptance of group goals

Another dimension of leadership behavior is used by the leader to promote cooperation and to assist staff members in working together toward a set of common goals or beliefs (Corbett & Wilson, 1992; Louis, 1989). Schlechty (2001) asserts that change begins with beliefs: beliefs about discrepancies between the way things are and the way they should be. The task of transforming a low-performing school district to one that is high-achieving requires the superintendent to alter one deeply held set of assumptions, beliefs, and practices within the district and replace it with a new set of assumptions, beliefs, and practices, which can be an extremely difficult process. According to Senge (1990), much of the leverage required to change people's belief systems and practices lies in the ability of the leader to challenge the mental models of members of the organization in order to gain more insightful understandings about the current reality.

Leaders as teachers help people restructure their views of reality to see the underlying, systemic causes of problems and, therefore, to see new possibilities for shaping the future (Fullan, 2001; Senge, 1990). In order to gain consensus toward a common purpose and desired belief system, the superintendent must set a direction for the district and continually refocus the organization on the vision and expectations for change (Senge, 1990).

High performance expectations

The fourth dimension of leadership is behavior that demonstrates the leader's expectations for quality, excellence, or high performance among members of the organization (Musella, 1995; Podsakoff, et al., 1990; Leithwood, 1995). Several studies linked the establishment of district norms for accountability and high standards of student achievement by the superintendent as a key determiner in the achievement of performance goals (Bryk et al., 1998; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Coleman and LaRoque, 1990; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Hallinger & Edwards; 1992; Musella, 1995; Ragland, Asera & Johnson, 1999; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000; Simpson, 2003). At the heart of the accountability system is the expectation that teachers and administrators will improve their instructional practice and provide more challenging content at higher levels of complexity. It is also the expectation that adults are responsible for ensuring that all students succeed academically. The superintendent must be willing to demonstrate through policies, procedures, and direct actions his or her seriousness of purpose that performance expectations will be met by every district staff member. Effective superintendents develop systems for supervising, evaluating, and holding people accountable for practices that contribute positively to the mission of the district (Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000).

The state accountability system in Texas was founded on the assumption that differences in achievement due to race or SES factors were unacceptable (TEA, 1998). In a few district effectiveness studies of high poverty school districts, superintendents and district level leadership aligned their expectations to

the state policy and promoted the expectation that all children in their districts, regardless of their racial and SES differences, would achieve at equally high academic levels (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). Although, prior to the articulation of equity beliefs, the professional staff members and the community in these districts believed that children from low income homes would not excel academically, after the expectations were raised and communicated by the superintendent and other district leaders, the district belief systems came to be shared by virtually all the staff (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). Establishing high standards of performance for all students was the catalyst to transformation in these high performing districts.

Providing individualized support

The fifth dimension of leadership is behavior used by the leader to indicate respect for organizational members; concern about their feelings, needs, and organizational success; and a feeling of responsibility for their welfare (Leithwood, Steinbach, & Raun, 1995; Podsakoff, 1990). Lewin and Regine (2000) make the case that leaders in successful organizations focus on people and relationships as an essential mechanism to achieve sustained results. Senge (1990) described this concern as an attitude of stewardship or servant leadership, one that is characteristic of transformational leaders.

Holdaway and Genge (1995) asserted that effective superintendents give high priority to good communication and cordial relations with staff members and others. Superintendents demonstrated respect and concern by paying close

attention to the professional growth of staff members (Leithwood, Steinbach, and Raun, 1995). For example, effective superintendents carefully attended to the development of the management capabilities of district administrators and principals to lead change (Fullan, 2001). They also invested heavily in the professional development of teachers in their districts and allocated adequate fiscal, human, and material resources to schools (LaRoque & Coleman, 1989; Skrla, Scheurich, and Johnson, 2000).

Elmore and Burney (1999) described the use of professional development as a management strategy to improve district performance by Anthony Alvarado, superintendent of District 2 in New York City. Over the eight years of Alvarado's tenure, the district evolved a strategy for the use of professional development to improve teaching and learning. The strategy consisted of a set of organizing principles about the process of systemic change and the role of professional development in that process. According to Elmore and Burney (1999), "Instructional improvement is the main purpose of district administration, and professional development is the chief means of achieving that purpose. Anyone with line administrative responsibility has responsibility for professional development as a central part of his or her job description" (p. 272).

Intellectual stimulation

The sixth dimension of leadership is behavior used by the leader to challenge his or her staff to reexamine their assumptions about their work and to rethink how it could be performed differently (Leithwood, 1995; Musella, 1995; Podsakoff, 1990). Musella (1995) described superintendent practices that

constituted intellectual stimulation for district staff members. These practices included: the provision of initiatives to stimulate new ideas, increased levels of professional development for teachers, and decentralization of decision-making (Musella, 1995). Effective superintendents created the time, conditions, and structures that allowed teachers to reflect and think together about their practice, to share what they learn in their classrooms, and to build a base of professional knowledge (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). They provided training for teachers, allocation of resources for schools, and opportunities for collegial collaboration and decentralized decision-making, practices that most likely accounted for the perception among staff members that their districts were challenging places to work (Bryk et al., 1998; Musella, 1995). Superintendents who empower their employees and act to stimulate the creativity, talent, and intellectual needs of personnel are effectively contributing to the growth and development of their school districts. According to Gardner (1990), the key to renewal is the release of human energy and talent within the organization.

Organizational Change

Theory related to organizational change is useful in developing an understanding of the superintendent's leadership of educational reform in public schools. Through the trial and error of attempts at school reform, we have learned that the process of planned educational change is more complex than anticipated (Fullan, 1991). As state departments become increasingly interventionist in the reform arena, responding to federal pressure for accountability under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the potential problems associated with governments as sources of

innovation become more acute (Elmore, 2002). In addition to the confusing variety and complexity of reforms to choose from, policymakers and practitioners confront the reality that reforms can have unintended negative consequences that far outweigh their benefits (Lindquist & Mauriel, 1989; Louis, 1989). There is a need, therefore, for school leaders who bear the responsibility for initiating, negotiating, and leveraging reform at the district level to develop meaning for the process and dynamics of educational change (Fullan, 2001).

Leading the Change Process

In an era of accountability and reform, leadership becomes central to achieve desired performance goals since leadership is needed to focus and motivate the wide range of individuals who affect student learning (Adams & Kirst, 1999). According to Fullan (2001), "Improvement will not happen if leaders and others do not have a deep theoretical grasp of the principles of change" (p. 268). In reviewing management schools of thought, Mintzberg et al. (1998) concluded that change can be understood, and perhaps led, but not controlled. Thus, leaders need to understand it better in order to lead it better.

The literature on school reform focuses primarily on the role of the principal in effecting change and the emerging role of teachers as decision-makers in the development of professional learning communities. The implication is that schools are the unit of change and function independently of any larger organization (Fullan, 2001). This notion is misleading and fails to recognize the essential role of the superintendent in the implementation and sustained success of all reform initiatives (Huberman & Miles, 1984; Johnson, 1996; Murphy, 1995).

Although individual teachers and schools can bring about change without the support of district administrators, district wide change will not occur, nor will the change sustain itself, without the support of the district superintendent and central office administrators (Fullan, 2001; Schlechty, 1997). The superintendent and other key leaders affect the quality of implementation to the extent that they understand and facilitate the change process and that they show specific the forms of support, access, and resources necessary to put change into practice (Fullan, 2001).

An early model of planned organizational change was proposed by Kurt Lewin (1952) to describe a three-stage process of change over time. The first step, unfreezing, is the process of creating a readiness for change within the culture of the organization. The second step is the implementation of the desired change. The third step, refreezing, is the process of making the change permanent and an enduring part of the organizational culture (Johns, 1996; Lewin, 1952; Stringfield & Datnow, 1998).

Noting that Lewin's model failed to adequately address the dimensions of change, Moorhead and Griffin (1995) proposed the Continuous Change Process Model of Organizational Change. In this model, the change process is directed by a person who acts as a change agent to introduce and manage the change effort. Throughout the process, the change agent introduces new ideas and viewpoints that enable members of the organization to consider problems in new ways.

Schein’s (1992) model of organizational change placed paramount importance on the leadership that initiates the change process. According to

Schein (1992), the leader is responsible for providing the disconfirming data that initiates the change process, including the anxiety and guilt to motivate change; providing the psychological safety zone in which organizational members can consider the need for change; and providing a vision to guide and direct the change effort.

Although Schein (1992) focused on the need for a single leader at the top to initiate change, Louis (1989) noted that school improvement is a multi-level process, requiring the cooperation and leadership of actors at all levels of the educational system, including the superintendent, as well as organizations that provide external support to schools (Fullan, 2001). While the school remains the focus of change, the district's improvement policy is designed to affect many schools as well as many classrooms in the process of change (Louis, 1989).

Reforms often fail because those responsible for implementing reform initiatives do not grasp the complexity and the multidimensional nature of educational change (Fullan, 2001). The implementation of educational reform involves a change in instructional practice in order to achieve a true change in learning outcomes. During the change process, it is possible for teachers or administrators to achieve surface change by adopting new instructional materials or new teaching approaches or strategies, without conceptualizing the rationale for the change or altering their pedagogical beliefs (Fullan, 2001). It is also possible for teachers to value and to articulate the goals of change without understanding the implications for practice. Fullan (2001) emphasizes that unless teachers learn not only how to implement the new practice but also to understand

and value it, implementation of the change will be superficial. It is up to leadership to create the meaning and means for change.

Reframing the Organizational Culture

Much of the literature on organizational change demonstrates the importance of organizational culture to school improvement efforts (Schlechty, 1997). A fundamental premise in the reform literature is that understanding school district culture can assist school superintendents in shaping the beliefs and actions of those affected by the organization (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1992; Musella, 1991; Johnson, 1996; Schlechty, 1997). Fullan (2001) states that "Leading in a culture of change means creating a culture of change" (p. 44). According to Schein (1992), building an organization's culture and sustaining its evolution is the unique and essential function of school leadership.

Culture refers to the tacit assumptions and beliefs supporting the methods of operation in a school organization (Davis, 1989; Schein, 1992). It also refers to the rules, roles, and relationships that govern the habitual patterns of interactions among the members of the organization (Schlechty, 1997). Culture performs two important functions. First, it provides members with a way of interpreting and making sense of events and symbols (Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, 1988). Second, it prescribes the way people should behave (Tichy & Ulrich, 1984).

The importance attached to culture in schools is based on a belief that there is a strong relationship between organizational culture and organizational effectiveness and that changes in the culture will depend on actions by the leader (Musella, 1995; Schein, 1992). Davis (1989) suggests that school culture is

profound, unique, and robust; that is, America's schools are loosely connected in a management sense but tightly connected in a cultural sense. Structural change that is unsupported by corresponding changes in the culture will eventually be overwhelmed by the culture, because it is only in culture that organizations find meaning and stability (Schlechty, 1997).

In case studies of successful organizations, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) explain that these organizations were effective because of the members' skills in creating and sharing organizational knowledge, which refers to "the capability of an organization to create new knowledge, disseminate it throughout the organization, and to embody it in products, services, and systems" (p. 3). When people begin sharing tacit knowledge about issues they see as important, the sharing itself creates a culture of learning (Elmore, 1995; Lambert, 2003). Leaders access tacit knowledge by creating frameworks for collaboration and knowledge exchange in the context of the workplace (Elmore, 2000). In order to encourage and stimulate collaboration and the sharing of tacit knowledge, people are selected, rewarded, and retained based on their willingness to acquire the learning that is required to achieve the purposes of the organization and to exchange information as a responsibility of membership (Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2001).

Fink and Resnick (1999) refer to the example of District 2 in New York City, under the leadership of Superintendent Anthony Alvarado, as an example of "learning in context" where organizational practices support the professional development of principals at their school sites. Some of the strategies include: visits to other sites, peer networks, supervisory walkthroughs, district institutes,

and individualized coaching. In District 2, the goal is to develop principals who focus intensely on instruction and learning and who are responsible for establishing a culture of learning, or professional learning communities, in the school (Fink & Resnick, 1999; Newmann, et al., 2000).

Leaders shape the organizational culture by identifying what cultural content is preferred, by assessing the culture with respect to content, symbols, and communication patterns prior to initiating the cultural change, and by exercising leadership strategies that are appropriate for the context in action (Musella, 1995). To effect a lasting change in the culture, "the rules and relationships that define the culture must be altered and changes must occur in the shared beliefs, meanings, values, lore, and traditions in which structure is embedded and from which it gains its permanence and stability" (Schlechty, 1997, p. 135). The extent to which the cultural change occurs in the intended direction is dependent on both the interpretive activities of the leaders during the change and the available elements in the culture to be modified (Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, 1988).

Leaders use behaviors and language to express cultural content and to provide cues about acceptable behavior for members (Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone, 1988). Rituals and symbols; organizational stories, sagas, myths; and legends (Tichy & Ulrich, 1984) are some of the media used by leaders to breathe meaning into cultural acts. An additional strategy, altering systems, is used by leaders to create new patterns of interaction within the organization. Accomplished by rearranging the chains of command, or flattening the

organizational hierarchy, these dramatic changes help create a climate of receptivity to change in the organization (Schein, 1992).

Systems can also be altered when the leader challenges the mental models of the main carriers of the culture and embeds new definitions in organizational processes and routines. Because each culture is different, the meaning of the change must be reconstructed in each location; the reconstruction will be shaped by local understandings of the appropriate means and ends of education (Rossman, Corbett, & Firestone,1988).

Organizations that survive and adapt to the dynamic changes in the environment are characterized by a cultural core of the following elements: a commitment to learning and change; a commitment to people in the organization and to those it serves; and a commitment to building a healthy, flexible organization (Schein, 1992).

History of Educational Reform

Over the past two decades, the United States has engaged in a period of sustained educational reform. This effort has brought a steady increase in external pressure on schools and school superintendents for change and little in the way of tangible evidence that student learning has improved (Fullan, 2001). Most recently, policymakers at the state and federal levels are exerting unprecedented pressure on schools for improved student performance, using goals, standards, and new systems of assessment and accountability as sources of leverage for change (Elmore, 1995). In light of this pressure, it is significant that, aside from small pockets of excellence in scattered classrooms and school

districts across the country, changes in policy have not achieved the broad changes in teaching practice and school organization envisioned by reformers (Elmore, 1995). The incapacity of policymakers to connect broad-scale policy efforts with the particularities of teaching and learning is a recurring pattern in the history of educational reform (Cuban, 1988; Elmore, 1996).

Reform Prior to 1980

There were two major reform efforts prior to 1980. The first occurred around the turn of the 20th century with the Progressive School Movement, a long and intense period of educational reform directed at changing classroom pedagogy from a teacher-centered to a child-centered form of instruction (Elmore, 1996). The second period of reform was the brief post-Sputnik period between the 1960s to early 1970s when large-scale innovation took place across the United States to correct the weaknesses in school curriculum and instructional practices. The broad curriculum reforms of the 1960s and 1970s were quite similar to the progressive reforms, though more tightly focused on content (Elmore, 1996).

The pattern that emerged during both periods of reform was a problem of scale (Elmore, 1996). Although in isolated settings, there were model schools or exemplars of pedagogy that dramatically altered classroom practice, the changed environments represented a small fraction of the total number of schools. The connection between the reform ideas and best practice was unable to be propogated on a broad scale to other classrooms and other institutions, and the fundamental core of educational practice remained unchanged (Cuban, 1984). In assessing the overall results of the reform strategies, the reformers failed to

recognize the complex processes that are involved in changing the structures, relationships, and regularities of institutions into broad-scale changes in practice (Cuban, 1990; Elmore, 1996; DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Reform from 1980 to Present

The reform period, which began in the 1980s and which persists today, is the era of federal- and state-initiated reforms. Political discourse during this period, according to Elmore (1996), was focused on three themes: empowerment (change in the conditions of teachers' work in schools and decision-making processes), accountability (changes in governance and incentive structures under which schools operate, or the distribution of power), and academic learning (changes in teaching and learning in schools). The impetus for this reform era was a belief that the United States was on the verge of being displaced as a major player in the world economy as a result of the poor academic performance of its schools (Adams & Kirst, 1999). Underlying the call for reform was widespread public demand for excellence and a consensus that public schools, as they were currently constituted, were incapable of meeting society's expectations for the education of all children (Elmore, 1990; Adams & Kirst, 1999).

The call for excellence is routinely traced to *A Nation at Risk*, a federal report published in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education and keenly crafted toward arousing public debate on improving education (Murphy, 1991). This report, and a host of other national reports that followed, served to focus the attention of state policymakers on the reform agenda and provided a comprehensive analysis of the state of public education. The

conclusions were less than flattering, painting a grim picture of declining test scores, poor leadership, poor instruction, and a lack of professional competence in the teaching profession (Finn & Rebarber, 1992). In addition to recommendations regarding challenging curriculum, high expectations, and rigorous standards for performance, the members of the Commission wrote that the nation's citizens "must demand the best effort and performance from all students, whether they are gifted or less able, affluent or disadvantaged" and hold educators responsible for schools' success (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p 466). In summary, the Commission presented America with the message that "education was declining, it was important, and schools must be held accountable for improvement" (p. 466).

Following the publication of the Commission's report, accountability became the defining theme of the period, engaging politicians, legislators, reformers, business leaders, professionals, and parents in designing accountability systems to focus on student performance (Adams & Kirst, 1999). Mirroring the accountability movement in other public sectors, national and state political systems generated new standards, legislation, and initiatives designed to drive school improvement.

Standards, Restructuring and Accountability

Excellence Movement

The literature characterizes the current reform era as a series of recurring "waves" of reform. During the first wave of reform in the early 1980s, often referred to as the "Excellence Movement," state legislatures created policy to establish rigorous standards by mandating longer school days, higher graduation

standards, higher teacher's salaries, and minimum competency tests for teachers and students (Finn & Rebarber, 1992).

Criticism of these reform efforts were quickly forthcoming. Reform initiatives of this period were determined to be "top down, quick fix" measures to mandate improvement through standardization and compliance at the expense of local autonomy (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 6). According to Fullan (2001), these early policy initiatives did more damage than good. They put tremendous pressure on local systems for accountability, provided little support, and increased the fragmentation of improvement efforts.

Standards Movement

The demise of the "excellence movement" prompted a second wave of reform strategies for school improvement. The first strategy called for national goals and standards to direct educational improvement efforts. In 1989, President Bush convened the nation's governors for a unique summit meeting on education. The summit focused on two main goals: 1) to establish a system of accountability and stimulate state and local initiatives to change schools and learning; and 2) to create an environment conducive to reform and innovation. Two years after the summit, President Bush announced *America 2000*, a rigorous 15-point accountability plan to address national educational goals. The President called for the creation of world-class standards for students and high quality tests to assess their achievement (Texas Education Agency, 1996). This focus, along with the federal government's decision to deregulate, created the momentum for state-led reform.

Restructuring Movement

Parallel to the standards movement, another reform strategy was initiated in which reformers argued for a fundamental overhaul, or "restructuring" of the educational enterprise (Murphy, 1992). The call for restructuring was founded on the belief that authority should be devolved to the school site so that educational decisions would be made by professionals who work most closely to students, and so that leadership was broadly shared by many members of the organization, including parents (David, 1990; Lindquist & Mauriel, 1989; Timar & Kirp, 1988).

A popular form of restructuring that emerged in the late 1980s was site-based, or school-based, management (SBM). SBM involved changes in the roles, relationships, and governance structures within the school district, devolving authority from superintendents, central office, and school boards to schools (Goodlad, 1984; Purkey, 1990; Sizer, 1985). Devolving authority to the schools empowered teachers, parents, and administrators to participate in decisions about personnel, finance, curriculum, and instruction and to solve educational problems particular to their schools (David, 1989). Altering governance structures and redistributing the locus of decision-making authority were viewed by researchers and practitioners as important vehicles for stimulating improvements in schools (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990; Purkey, 1990).

To support restructuring, many states implemented a new range of initiatives in the early 1990s to promote teacher professionalism, decentralization and deregulation of schooling, SBM, and other teacher-empowering components of school restructuring (Ogawa, 1993; Ovando, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1989).

According to Darling-Hammond and Ascher (1991, p.9), “Most school-based management proposals call for shared decision-making among faculty, staff, parents, students, and community partners.” The altered relationships were expected to foster autonomy and greater accountability for decisions at the school site (Fullan, 2001), resulting in improved school performance (Malen & Ogawa, 1990). The central assumption supporting SBM was that "better decisions will be made when those closest to the situation and who live with the decisions are involved" (Darling-Hammond & Ascher, 1991, p. 9).

Increased control and flexibility for teachers and administrators in decentralized organizations carried a powerful caveat for school personnel. “The price of freedom [in decision-making] is a new set of obligations,” in which schools are expected to “take responsibility for their performance as individuals and for the performance of the school as a whole and to consult with and anticipate the reactions of diverse constituencies” (Hill & Celio, 1998, p. 11). Thus, as teachers and school administrators become more independent and more responsible for school operations, greater accountability must shift to the school along with the shift in responsibility and authority (Hill & Celio, 1998). In decentralized organizations, schools are accountable to multiple publics including the district, the state, parents, business and community members, and students (Hill & Celio, 1998).

A number of researchers have reported the results of experiments with SBM (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990; David, 1989; Johnson, 1989; Hill & Bonan, 1991; Hill & Celio, 1998; Ovando, 1994; Wagstaff, J., 1995). Despite the

optimism attached to restructuring efforts, much of the early research failed to validate the success of school restructuring efforts. Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz (1990) questioned whether SBM as originally designed had succeeded in altering the decision-making structures in school systems, produced quality planning, or resulted in major changes in the curriculum and instructional programs of schools.

In studies of the impact of restructuring, when given the opportunity to make decisions for their school site, school practitioners often chose to focus on peripheral issues such as student discipline that did not directly address instructional strategies or the quality of teaching and learning (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; David; 1989; Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990). Ovando (1994) noted that school site-based teams participated in decisions that resulted in changes in curriculum and instruction based on their relative expertise in the processes of decision-making and their interpretation of the curriculum in the school and district. According to Ovando (1994), the impact of these changes on student achievement needs further documentation.

The predominant evidence suggest there were insufficient data to link the components of reform such as SBM (Elmore,1990; Fullan, 1991; Kirst, 1992; Malen, Ogawa & Kranz, 1990; Murphy, 1995) and teacher empowerment (Cohen, 1990; Johnson, 1989) with performance outcomes. While there is the potential for these structures to shape the conditions that in turn influence outcomes, structural changes in and of themselves do not appear to predict changes in the content or quality of instruction nor organizational success, e.g., improved student learning (Elmore, 2000). As a result, at the conclusion of the restructuring

movement, policymakers continued to search for stronger solutions to drive educational improvement. However, many states continue to experiment with SBM and decentralization strategies as a means to increase accountability and school performance, and a few states, including Texas, have implemented decentralization policies as a formal component of their systems of state-initiated reform (Bryk et al., 1998; Grissmer & Flanagan, 1999).

In recent studies of broad-scale district effectiveness, highly successful districts shared a common characteristic of using decentralization as a component strategy of restructuring and re-culturing in their district organizations, striking a balance between too much structure and too little structure in the schools (Bryk et al., 1998, p. 279; Caweli & Protheroe, 2001; Elmore & Burney, 1999; La Roque & Coleman, 1989; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). In these successful districts, decentralization occurred within a context of capacity-building and external accountability. Decision-making was decentralized to the schools, and central offices were reorganized to provide the extra-school infrastructure needed to promote improvement. Additionally, a system of accountability was established in order to track the progress of school improvement efforts and to intervene in failing situations (Bryk et al., 1998). These studies demonstrate that decentralization and site-based management may be successful when used in concert with other policies to create systemic change in schools.

Coleman and LaRoque (1990) describe changes in the organizational culture of high-performing districts resulting from the transformational behaviors exhibited by the superintendents “to involve creating and sustaining a positive

district ethos which affects principals and through them teachers, students, and parents" (p. 67). Coleman and LaRoque (1990, p. 68) found that, through "reaching out," superintendents in successful districts fostered a positive ethos that supported district improvement and school effectiveness. The practices associated with such leadership included a focus on the leaders' entry process cultural assessment, creation of a vision, mobilization of commitment, and the institutionalization of cultural change (Coleman & LaRoque, 1990). The superintendent in this study shaped the organizational culture by first assessing the existing culture and selecting the preferred content prior to exercising leadership appropriate for the context (Musella, 1995).

New Educational Accountability in the 1990s

In the 1990s, yet a third wave of reform emerged which called for the systemic redesign of education (Murphy, 1995). In response to federal and public concerns about school performance, state education agencies began to exercise a systemic approach to reform by working to increase the coherence and alignment of the component reform policies (O'Day & Smith, 1993). The new state accountability systems were intended to produce broad based changes in teaching and learning across entire school systems, holding all schools in the district accountable to the same standard (Elmore, 2002). In systems of educational accountability, attention shifted from the district to the school as the locus of performance and from compliance monitoring to student performance outcomes as a means of holding schools accountable for improvement (Fuhrman, 1999; Lusi, 1994; Slaganik, 1994; Smith & O'Day, 1990). Additionally, educational

accountability systems sought to address quality and equity issues by using a coherent set of aligned policies to ensure that all students learn ambitious content knowledge and higher-order thinking skills (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Cohen, 1996; Elmore, Abelmann, & Fuhrman, 1996; Lusi, 1994).

Federal Systems of Accountability

Historically the federal government has refrained from taking an active role in managing the public schools, honoring the time-honored traditions of local control and devolving authority over schools to state departments of education and local school districts (Elmore, 2002).

Recently, however, accountability and reform has moved to the top of the national agenda with the passage of new pieces of legislation that bear witness to the changing role of federal and state departments of education in the public schools (Center for Education Policy, 2003). The first indication of this new approach was the 1994 reauthorization of Title I through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). In 1994, the ESEA was amended to require that states create performance-based accountability systems for schools to include these components: academic standards, assessments based on standards, and reporting of results. The vision behind the law was that Title I would complement and accelerate the trend already begun in many states to implement state-initiated accountability systems, with an alignment of federal and state policies to occur by the year 2000 (Elmore, 2002). By the year 2000, the target date for full compliance with the requirements of the law, virtually all states provided some form of statewide testing program and release of results, but fewer than half the

states met the requirements. Compliance with the law by most states was largely symbolic (Elmore, 2002).

The response to these disappointing results was new legislation, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2002,* which placed even greater demands upon the states and local school districts. This sweeping reform legislation, signed into law by President George W. Bush, on January 8, 2002, transformed the federal role in K-12 education to ensure that every state implement stringent accountability measures to eliminate the growing academic achievement gap between rich and poor, Anglo and minority, and to hold the states accountable for results (Popham, 2003). The legislation restored federal involvement in education, based on acknowledgement of the disappointing results of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, (ESEA), which has funded since 1965 hundreds of educational programs, at a cost of $120 billion a year, to improve America's schools.

The legislation targets four priorities and links continued funding of federal dollars to those entities that meet performance standards (Center for Education Policy, 2003). The priorities are: increased accountability for student performance; an emphasis on proven, research-based programs and practices; added flexibility and local control to states and school districts; and increased choice and voice for parents of children in low performing schools (Popham, 2003). The legislation also places greater demands on states and school districts to expand their testing programs, close the achievement gaps, provide technical assistance to low-performing schools and districts, and hire or develop better-

qualified teachers. Under the law, states must define a level of proficiency that all students are expected to reach and set a timetable for achieving this level by school year 2013-2014 (Center for Education Policy, 2003).

Although the specific regulations and full implications of the legislation are only recently being interpreted and fully understood at the state and local levels, there is heightened activity everywhere as state governments are scurrying to enact hastily contrived accountability systems without the opportunity to allow all the prerequisite policies to evolve in a logical, planned, and incremental process (Jerald, 2000; Elmore, 2002).

State and Local Accountability Systems

The component policies in state accountability systems commonly include some or all of the following: rigorous content standards or curriculum frameworks; assessments that focused teachers and students on intellectually challenging tasks and were aligned with content standards; rating systems for reporting performance results; school report cards which summarized the performance of individual schools; monetary rewards for successful schools; professional development and pay raises for teachers; legal authority to sanction (close or reconstitute) low-performing schools; and teacher evaluation programs linked to student performance results (Fullan, 2001; Fuhrman, 1999; Reeves, 2004).

In theory, the component policies of state accountability reform systems work together to focus external policy, administration, and practice directly on teaching and learning. Ideally, accountability policies achieve this alignment by

"defining goals, allocating authority, managing incentives, building capacity, measuring progress, reporting results, and enforcing consequences, all related to student performance" (Adams & Kirst, 1999, p. 464). In practice, there has been a wide variability in the state policy response as regional differences and political context of individual states shape the interpretation and enthusiasm for participation in the reform movement (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Cohen, 1995; Mazzoni, 1994).

The long history of school reform demonstrates that reforms rarely last because the individuals who make it happen, those who are responsible for the changes, are not committed to the effort (Cuban, 1990; Elmore, 1996; McLaughlin, 1987). While policymakers use external accountability systems to focus attention on improving student performance, the accountability reform policies are themselves insufficient to motivate teachers to change their instructional practice (Lusi, 1994). Promoting compliance with reform policies involves enhancing the motivation and capacity of personnel to attain accountability goals (Lusi, 1994).

To address the local issues of motivation and behaviors for success in systems of accountability, policymakers in some states created expectations for results, systems of incentives [pressures and supports], and efforts to foster capacity building in schools (Fullan, 2001). Some of the policies developed to support motivation and success included monetary rewards for achievement, salary increases, and ongoing professional development for teachers. Due to the problematic nature of incentive policies, few states have implemented successful

systems of incentives (Elmore, 2002). Fullan (2001) noted that many state governments have implemented accountability policies, a few have successfully provided incentives; and none have seriously affected capacity, although several are now working on it. However, school systems may themselves motivate teachers to increase student achievement through their efforts to build staff capacity to support student learning (Elmore, 1996; Elmore, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2000).

There is a growing body of evidence to support the combination of state initiated systems of accountability and incentives to produce achievement results (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Fullan, 2001; Grissmer & Flanagan 1998). In studies of accountability systems in North Carolina, Texas, and Connecticut, researchers attributed achievement gains to a number of factors, including clearly stated content and performance standards, an incentive structure that focused on the performance of all groups of students, consistency and continuity of focus among political leaders, clear accountability processes, and a willingness to give flexibility to administrators and teachers in crafting local responses to the accountability systems (Elmore, 2000). State reform strategies that did not include substantial efforts to improve the nature and quality of classroom instruction showed little success in raising achievement (Fullan, 2001).

According to Elmore (2002), research supports the notion that it is unlikely schools will respond to pressure from external accountability systems without relatively coherent internal systems of accountability and support to build the capacity of school staff. A critical task for superintendents and other school

district leadership is to formulate local accountability policies that are aligned within the system and with external state accountability criteria (Adams & Kirst, 1999). Leaders must create common expectations among teachers about the standards of accountability and anticipated results.

The task of district and campus educational leaders to implement accountability reform is to enhance the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, both individually and through professional learning communities, to secure the resources necessary to teach new standards, to create coherence in the programs of instruction, to develop a common culture of expectations for performance, and to hold individuals accountable for results (Elmore; 2000; Newmann et al., 2000). While Newmann and his colleagues (2000) posit that the principal is the key to create capacity-building initiatives at the school site, Spillane (1994) and Elmore (2002) assert that superintendents of local school districts, and the central office under their direction, play a key role in mediating reform and bringing reform to scale across many school settings within the district.

Progress toward implementation of coherent accountability systems is diverse and uneven across the fifty states (Elmore, 2002; Olson, 2004). While a handful of states such as Texas, North Carolina, and Connecticut have developed ambitious systems of reform that include most of the policy elements necessary to hold schools accountable, very few states have attended to all the necessary components of an accountability system (Cross et al., 2004; Fuhrman, 1999; Olson, 2004).

Currently, while all states are administering some form of statewide testing programs and publicly report their data, only 45 states disaggregate their performance data, and 43 publicly report the results of their low-performing schools (Doherty, 2004). All states must rate schools on whether they have made "adequate yearly progress" toward meeting performance goals. According to data collected by *Education Week,* 23,800 schools did not meet those performance targets for 2002-2003 (Doherty, 2004). While 37 states administer standards-based assessments to K-12 students, only 20 states meet President Bush's guidelines to test all 3rd through 8th graders in English and mathematics for 2003-2004 (Rebora, 2004). Further, in only 13 states and District Columbia would those tests be comparable from year to year (Rebora, 2004).

State-Initiated Reform in Texas

Since 1991, the state of Texas has aggressively implemented a new model of state and local governance based upon a touchstone of educational accountability. The standards-based reform initiative in Texas is systemic and robust, consisting of several component reform initiatives that were coherently aligned to support the state educational goals of equity and excellence in achievement for all students (Texas Education Agency, 1997). These components include decentralization of authority to districts and schools; district and campus planning and SBM; a strong professional development component; a challenging standards-based curriculum framework; and the performance-based accountability system. Organizational decentralization was intended to link with accountability as the driving force to improve student performance (Grissmer & Flanagan,

1998). An important component of the accountability system in Texas was the emphasis on the public's right to know the level of performance of campuses and districts throughout the state (Texas Education Agency, 1998).

Concerned with the rapidly changing demographic and economic changes in the state, Texas has used the accountability system as the primary lever to achieve equality of opportunity for all children in Texas (Marshall, Mitchell, & Wirt, 1989). Among the fifty states, Texas has the fourth-highest percentage of children living in poverty. Nearly half the state's public school students are black or Hispanic, minority groups that historically have scored poorly on measures of academic achievement (Palmaffy, 1998). An important function of the accountability system was to highlight and address the issues of equity and poor performance of minority and economically disadvantaged students in Texas (Texas Education Agency, 1998).

The Texas accountability system was founded on the principle that controlling for student income or prior achievement institutionalizes low expectations for poor, minority, and low-achieving students. A point of view contributing to low academic performance of minority children occurred in schools where the social and economic factors of student groups were used as an excuse for poor performance (Elmore, Abelmann, & Fuhrman, 1996). These low expectations, in effect, held schools with large proportions of such students to a lower standard of performance (Texas Education Agency, 1996). The accountability system sought to correct the climate of low expectations with a "no excuses" paradigm and a new standard of expectation for all student groups,

regardless of circumstance, to reach high levels of academic performance. The system provided that policy and resources should be used to create incentives for schools with high proportions of poor, minority, and low-achieving students to improve learning for these students at a faster rate than other students.

The heart of the accountability system was the statewide assessment program. Beginning in 1990-91, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) was implemented at grades 3-8 and 10 throughout the state. By 1993, disaggregated student performance data from TAAS were reported in the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS), the state's vehicle for reporting to its publics the results on the campus and district performance indicators. The data were used to accredit districts, to rate campuses, and to hold campuses and school districts accountable for student learning (Texas Education Agency, 1996). The assessment system has continued to evolve over time, adding new content areas, changing the grade levels tested, and expanding to include the participation of students previously exempted from the accountability system (Texas Education Agency; 1997; 2001).

Similar to other high-change reform states, Texas undertook standards-based curriculum reform by developing challenging expectations for student learning and aligning other policies, including assessment and accountability, to support the standards (Grissmer & Flanagan, 1998). In 1997, following a massive three–year development process, the new state curriculum, known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), was adopted. Implementation of the new curriculum included new instructional materials based on the TEKS,

extensive professional development activities, and a new alignment of the state assessment instrument with the TEKS (Texas Education Agency, 1998).

Overcoming Barriers to Reform

Historically, reformers have had little difficulty in developing new ideas about how to teach effectively and what those ideas look like in practice, at least in a few isolated settings (Cuban, 1984; Stringfield & Datnow, 1998). The difficulty has been in propogating the innovative practices to enough classrooms and schools to create new norms for how teaching and learning should occur on a broader scale (Cuban, 1984; Elmore, 1995; Elmore, 1996).

A lesson learned in the long history of educational reform is that teachers are skeptical about change and reluctant to embrace new reform strategies (Mohrman & Lawler, 1996). Cuban (1984; 1993), Elmore (1995), and Fullan (2001) offer analyses about the durability of teaching practices and why they persist in spite of recurring efforts to reform them. First, the changes in practice may require content knowledge and pedagogical skills that teachers do not possess (Elmore, 1995; Cohen, 1998). Second, the reform efforts often fail to recognize the basic cultural beliefs and patterns in the regularity of schooling that influence the subjective reality of teachers (Cuban, 1984; Elmore, 1995). Third, educational change is initiated in schools, often involuntarily, without the presence of mechanisms to establish shared meaning and program coherence for the change among the teachers and principals responsible for implementing the initiatives (Fullan, 2001).

The incapacity of teachers to embrace new instructional practice was demonstrated in case studies of elementary teachers implementing the California mathematics framework, an ambitious statewide reform initiative aimed at integrating higher order thinking strategies into mathematics instruction. In this study, Cohen (1998) found that the teachers' lack of mathematical knowledge led them to misinterpret the framework and the accompanying textbook and to avoid practices that would demonstrate their limited knowledge of mathematics. This research illustrated the critical need for district support to build local capacity as a precondition for change (Bryk et al., 1998). The leadership strategy to build local capacity is to increase the knowledge, skills, and predispositions of both individual staff members and the group as a precursor to the implementation of reform initiatives (Fullan, 2001).

The daily subjective reality of teachers was described by Huberman (1983), Rosenholtz (1989), and Ball and Cohen (1999). According to Huberman (1983), the multiple, immediate, and competing demands contributing to the "classroom press" affects teachers in a number of ways. It focuses their attention on the immediate and the concrete, isolates them from other adults, exhausts their energy, and limits their opportunities for sustained reflection. The resulting work environment can be characterized by autonomy, superficial learning, and limited opportunity for collegial interaction. Under these conditions, meaningful reform is difficult given the lack of opportunity for teachers to engage in sustained learning and collaborative practice (Fullan, 2001).

A significant barrier to educational reform occurs when change is initiated without a corresponding effort by district leadership to bring meaning and coherence for the proposed change policies among members of the school staff. Acquiring meaning for educational change was illustrated in Rosenholtz's (1989) study of 78 schools in 8 school districts in Tennessee. Rosenholtz (1989) classified schools as "stuck," "in-between," or "moving" based upon the degree to which teachers incorporated new ideas related to student learning into their instruction. The schools in which teachers developed a shared consensus about organizational goals and the meaning of their work were more likely to improve. In low-consensus schools, teachers worked in isolation and evidenced little improvement (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Similarly, Rosenholtz (1989) discovered that a disproportionate number of "stuck" schools were clustered in certain districts, while "moving" schools were clustered in other districts. Rosenholtz (1989) concluded that in districts where "stuck" schools were predominant, lack of attention to the training needs of principals by district leadership affected the principals' ability to assist teachers, and resulted in the professional isolation of both principals and teachers.

Fullan (2001) further examined the importance of local district support in overcoming barriers to reform and in contributing to the initiation and implementation of state-initiated reforms. An important policy response was the capacity-building approach taken by effective local school districts in which initiation began at the grassroots level and reached out to exploit state policies (Fullan, 2001). Together, the goal was to build capacities at the school and

district level so that schools and districts acted in a problem-solving manner to achieve lasting change.

The local school district factors, including the role of superintendent and central office staff in the change process, represented a major set of situational constraints or opportunities for effective change (Fullan, 2001). Fullan (2001) noted that innovations either flourished or died at the school level based upon the strategies and supports offered by the larger organization. Some districts had a history of continuous success in the implementation of reform initiatives while others seemed to fail at whatever they attempted (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000). The failures at reform may have resulted from inadequate planning or follow-through by the district to support adoption decisions, failure to build clarity among teachers about the essential features of the innovation (Fullan, 1999; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001), limited understanding among district leaders of the complexities of the change process (Spillane, 2000), or a poor "fit" of the innovation to the situation (Bodilly, 1998; Fullan, 2001). A repeated history of failed innovation in a district appeared to create a negative cynicism among teachers and others about future change attempts, regardless of the merit of the new idea or program. Thus, a district can create an incapacity for change as well as a capacity for it.

Noting that school districts are often resistant to external policy demands, DeYoung (1986) argued that superintendents, as district leaders, can create a climate of excellence that is receptive to change and can facilitate the effectiveness of programmatic change. However, if superintendents are skeptical

about reform policies they may serve as political agents to shield and buffer educational change proposals from destabilizing their institutions (Wirt & Kirst, 1972). In this regard, De Young (1986) suggested that superintendents are in a pivotal position to make recommendations and provide leadership to build capacity for successful change rather than passively respond to state mandates for reform.

In summary, reforms have failed for a variety of reasons. Fullan's comment is insightful: "Educational change is technically simple but socially complex" (Fullan, 1991, p. 65). "Most reforms foundered on the rocks of flawed implementation. Many were diverted by quiet but persistent resistance of teachers and administrators who were unconvinced about the value of embracing changes promoted by those who were unfamiliar with the classroom as a workplace" (Cuban, 1988, p. 343). In addition, it may be less about resistance and bad intentions than about the difficulties related to planning and coordinating a multilevel social process involving lots of people. What may be lacking in school reform is a matter of effective leadership.

Superintendent's Leadership of Educational Reform

The source of demands on school districts to reform has recently shifted from change initiated within the school organization to change imposed by state and federal departments of education (Wills & Peterson, 1995). The external policy demands for educational accountability in the 1990s require that school leaders bring reform to scale across entire school districts and improve the academic performance of all students. The success or failure of policy directives

is determined by how reform initiatives are operationalized at the district level (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Corbett & Wilson, 1992; Elmore, 1995). These mandates create vastly new and different challenges for school district leaders.

Interpreting the Reform Agenda

School leaders must respond to the political environment when it makes focused demands. Because the interests and practices of public education are entwined with those of government, business, and social agencies, superintendents cannot hope to lead districts without acknowledging their relationship to municipal and state interests and directives (Johnson, 1996). In the policy environment of reform, superintendents are mandated to respond to pressure for accountability with strategies to improve their school districts (Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1989).

A small body of literature focuses on the influence of the superintendent and the context of the local school district on the interpretation and successful implementation of the educational reform agenda. As the chief executive officer of the school district, the superintendent formulates the organization's interpretation of reform policy and the district's response to the reform agenda (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Leithwood, 1995; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). By virtue of their authority and positional roles, superintendents serve as gate-keepers to either facilitate or inhibit the flow of information, knowledge, and resources in their organizations. In this key leadership position, the

superintendent determines whether educational reform policies are viewed as constraints or opportunities to leverage change within the district (Firestone, 1995; Leithwood, 1995; Wills & Peterson, 1995).

Daft and Weick (1984) noted that strategic level leaders formulate the organization's interpretation of environmental information based on their scanning behaviors. Because leaders differ in the ways they "know the environment," managerial scanning of the environment and the choosing or rejecting of information sources forms a critical function of leadership. Applied in educational settings, Wills and Peterson (1995) posit that "superintendents are key environmental scanners, interpreters, and reactors in the face of state-initiated reforms" (p. 88). The superintendents' interpretations of state-initiated reforms, along with their sense of what is needed within the context of their local school districts, give rise to the forms of leadership in which they engage (Leithwood, 1995; Musella, 1995; Wills & Peterson, 1995).

The superintendent's leadership practice in an environment of reform is highly contextual (Leithwood, 1995; Musella, 1995; Schein, 1992). It is complicated by the variety of influences that impact and influence the superintendent. What aspects of the external environment do effective superintendents pay attention to, and how do these things influence their thinking? Research highlights at least five aspects of the external environment to be the most influential: the community, the school board, the internal features of the

school district, mandates from state and national governments, and political and social trends (Holdaway & Genge, 1995; Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000; Wills & Peterson, 1995). Of these, the greatest influence on superintendent thinking is the elected school board, sometimes overshadowing other leadership considerations (Allison, 1991; Wirt, 1991).

The political nature of the superintendent's position was revealed in studies by Holdaway and Genge (1995) and Johnson (1996). The superintendents in these studies interacted frequently with their school boards and identified political matters to be the biggest constraint upon their effectiveness (Musella, 1995). Studies demonstrated that while healthy board-superintendent relationships can serve as a support system to increase the effectiveness of the district (Ragland, Asera & Johnson,1999; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000), dysfunctional school boards and board-superintendent relationships can contribute to a climate of low performance and compromise the superintendent's ability to manage the district (Wirt, 1991).

A few studies demonstrated that superintendents respond differentially to state mandates based on their perceptions of economic and social changes in their communities, their interpretation of the mandate, and the unique characteristics of their individual school districts (DeYoung, 1986; Hord, Jolly, and Mendez-Morse, 1992; Wills & Peterson, 1995). For example, Wills and Peterson (1995) revealed that thirty superintendents in Maine developed strategies to implement school

improvement plans that varied according to their need to reduce uncertainty in their districts and the intensity of their concern or interest in the reform mandate. Their perceptions of the mandates seemed to be linked to the size of their districts and the availability of human and fiscal resources within the schools and district (Crowson and Morris, 1992; Murphy, 1995; Wills & Peterson, 1995). Some superintendents chose to buffer or defend the district against the mandate, using legitimating activities such as extensive documentation to discourage monitoring by the state department (Hallinger & Edwards, 1992; Leithwood, Steinback, & Raun, 1995; Wills and Peterson, 1995). Others used the mandate as a lever for change, in some cases exceeding the demands of the state and creating larger visions for change (Firestone, 1989; Murphy, 1995; Wills and Peterson, 1995).

A small but growing number of school district effectiveness studies revealed evidence that broad scale success could be tied to the interpretation and response to state-initiated mandates by superintendents, boards, and other district leaders (Bryk et al., 1998; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000; Simpson, 2003). In these effective districts, the leadership responded ethically to the state reform mandates with strategies that transformed their districts, creating district accountability systems that mirrored the intent of the state, and linking internal accountability practices to external policy standards. Strategies for improvement were aligned to equity beliefs as the fundamental lever to drive change.

Accepting “no excuses” for the low performance of groups of children, superintendents actively demonstrated to their publics the seriousness of their purpose, and created a sense of urgency in their districts to change (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 1999).

Thus, the literature offers limited evidence that the potential success of the reform effort to improve schooling is a function of the interpretations, perceptions, and responses to reform policies employed by district level leadership (Leithwood, 1995). The interpretations of mandates by superintendents appear to shape the district’s approach to reform and the quality of its implementation.

Leading District Improvement

Reforming districts requires a new kind of leadership, to support innovative approaches to schooling (Johnson, 1996, p. 273). Leadership theory points to the construct of transformational leadership as appropriate to effect change in school organizations (Leithwood, 1995; Schlechty, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1990). However, in studying the work of effective superintendents in environments of reform, the central question under consideration is to understand their leadership practices in relation to the contextual influences in which they derive (Leithwood, 1995).

Effective school improvement is a planned process. To create systemic change in their school districts, superintendents must plan and act strategically, with a preferred vision in mind and a focus on results (Elmore, 1995; 2000). Taking reform to scale requires highly expert, transforming leadership to infuse multidimensional change into the interconnecting properties of school systems while providing systems of support and encouragement to the membership through the hazardous journey of change. According to Adams and Kirst (1999), a mandate for leaders in the implementation of educational reform is to create coherent systems of accountability in their school districts, linking internal accountability policies and practices to the external policies of reform.

Until recently there were few models of district-wide success to serve as exemplars in the literature. However, a growing number of studies of district effectiveness have yielded results that are worthy of acknowledgement. These studies indicate that superintendents in effective school districts were intentional in creating shared beliefs about learning, including high expectations, and a focus on results (Bryk et al., 1998; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Elmore & Burney, 1999; LaRoque & Coleman, 1989; Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). The primary role of the superintendent was to continually maintain the focus of the district and community on equitable and excellent student learning (Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000).

Practices established by the superintendent and district leaders for improving instruction included a focus on curriculum alignment to state standards and the analysis of district assessment data to identify areas of instructional focus (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001). A focus on professional development and capacity building is another key strategy used by a few effective superintendents to promote the improvement of classroom instructional strategies (Bryk et al., 1998; Fullan, 2001; Musella, 1989). These superintendents took responsibility for the in-service needs of principals to build understanding and purpose for reform and to develop technical knowledge and problem-solving skills as a central strategy for facilitating school improvement (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Fullan, 2001; LaRoque & Coleman, 1989; Leithwood, 1989; Rosenholtz, 1989).

In an era of standards-based reform, the challenge for district leadership is to understand how accountability designs are supposed to work, to reconcile external and internal accountability concepts, to formulate coherent local policies, and to implement systemic processes of change (Adams & Kirst, 1999). District leadership in effective districts appear to interpret and respond to this mandate by spreading accountability throughout their systems, linking internal accountability practices to external policy standards (Fullan, 2001; LaRoque & Coleman, 1989; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson 2000). For example, Elmore & Burney (1999) described the leadership processes used by the superintendent of the high poverty District #2 in New York City to engage principals in collaborative discussions

about data and the implementation of campus improvement plans. These mechanisms, along with a focus on instruction and outcomes, served to hold principals accountable for results but allowed them flexibility and autonomy for developing innovative approaches to school (Bryk & Associates, 1998; Elmore & Burney, 1999; LaRoque & Coleman, 1989).

An important strategy used to establish the conditions for improvement in was serious restructuring of the school, the district, and their interrelationships (Fullan, 2001). Superintendents in a few effective district studies have employed restructuring strategies as a precursor for increasing accountability and instructional improvement in their schools (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Hill & Celio, 1998; Fullan, 2001). Restructuring generally includes the following elements: choice and voice for parents; deregulation of decision-making from the state and district to the school community; changes in district and school organizational and governance structures; professionalization and empowerment of teachers; and changes in curriculum and instruction (Cohen, 1990; Elmore, 2002; Malen & Ogawa, 1990; Murphy, 1995; Ovando, 1994). Bryk and associates (1998) described the transformation as cultural "renorming" in which district leaders abandon bureaucratic control to serve as advocates and resources for schools. They described the need for districts to establish four critical central office functions to support decentralization in district schools. These include: policy-making to support decentralization; a focus on local

capacity-building; a commitment to rigorous accountability; and stimulation of innovation (Bryk et al., 1998). Thus:

> Decentralization is based on the premise that the best accountability is not regulatory. While it may be necessary from time to time to use bureaucratic intervention in very troubled schools, the ultimate aim is a stronger base of professional norms of practice for educating all children well (Bryk, et al., 1998, p. 280).

The challenge facing the superintendent and district leaders in motivating district-wide change is enormous, involving transformation of deeply held assumptions, beliefs and practices (Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). Pressure and support by the superintendent is crucial in establishing the conditions for continuous improvement in many schools and classrooms and maintaining innovation over time (Huberman and Miles, 1984; Murphy, 1995). It is necessary, then, that district leaders have a "deep theoretical grasp of the principles of change" in order for improvement to happen (Fullan, 2001, p. 268).

Stimulating coherent development across many schools is exceedingly difficult, and there are few examples of success, because it requires “balancing top-down and bottom-up forces” (Fullan, 2001, p. 170). Leadership in successful systems characterizes the relationship between the schools and the district to be one of dynamic tension in which schools and the district continually negotiate co-development (Purkey & Smith, 1985).

Change efforts have been "most productive and enduring when directed toward influencing entire school culture through a strategy involving collaborative planning, shared decision-making, and collegial work in an atmosphere friendly to experimentation and evaluation" (p. 357). Mitchell and Tucker (1992) assert it is the values of superintendents, not their directives, who have an impact on schools. From their perspective, leadership derives from the way superintendents think, with effective thinking leading to effective action.

Changes in the structural and cultural components will vary from one school district to another, since change is largely contextual, depending on the unique characteristics of the reform environment, the school community, and the interpretations of the environment by the leaders. The results of effectiveness in superintendent leadership practices lead to improved organizational performance and intended results for students, parents, and community (Schlechty, 2001).

As a final note, when assessing the effectiveness of a school district, it is most often measured according to growth of student performance (Purkey & Smith, 1983). Schools have direct effects on the achievement of students. The effectiveness of school district leadership, especially that of school superintendents, is a different matter. Leithwood (1995) described the relationship of superintendent leadership practices (even of those superintendents considered to be extremely effective) to the learning outcomes of students to be largely indirect, considering their distance from the classroom. Leadership

influence is mediated by other aspects of the organization, which in turn affect the achievement of organizational goals and, ultimately, the academic performance of students. Thus, the effectiveness of the superintendents' leadership in initiating and implementing reform must be examined through the lens of more qualitative measures, through its impact on the various components of the organization that are open to the influence of the superintendent (Leithwood, 1995).

Chapter Summary

Important clues emerge from the literature to provide understanding for how leadership strategies of the superintendent are formulated and operationalized at the district level to bring reform to scale in the policy environment of accountability and systemic reform. A fundamental premise of reform is that all children should have access to challenging content and should be expected to perform at high standards of performance (Lusi, 1994). To achieve this goal, transforming leadership is needed to help organizations adapt to the pressures for accountability and increased student performance. Effective superintendents interpret the environments of reform and implement strategic plans of action, using reform policies and transformational leadership practices as the fulcrum to leverage change, resulting in academic success for all children.

An important issue in this study is that leadership literature is limited in its applicability to school district leadership. Immegart (1988) and Leithwood (1995) note that there is a substantial need for case study that contributes to the

development of an integrated understanding of leadership, one that is specific to change in the environment of state-initiated reform.

general areas of research to be examined. The remaining chapters include a review of the related literature, the research design and methodology, and the findings of the research. In Chapter Two, a review of related research on leadership theory, organizational change, the history of educational reform, and the superintendent's leadership of reform is presented. The literature review was extended to enhance Theoretical Sensitivity to emerging categories in the data as the study progressed. A detailed description of the research design, methodology, and data collection procedures is provided in Chapter Three. The findings from the research are presented in Chapter Four. A summary of the findings, conclusions, study implications, and recommendations are presented in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology and Procedures

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology and procedures that were used to answer the research questions posed in this study. The chapter is presented in five sections that detail the purpose of the study, the research questions, the site and participant selection, the study design, and data collection.

In the turbulent policy environment of state-initiated reform, superintendents are mandated to respond to pressure for accountability and increased student performance with strategies to bring reform to scale across their school districts (Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1989). It falls to leadership to create the conditions and the environment for policy to succeed.

Although there are a growing number of district effectiveness studies appearing recently in the literature, there continues to be limited research concerning the superintendents' leadership of accountability and educational reform in the context of a high poverty school district (Leithwood, 1995). Previous studies have failed to analyze the complexity of taking reform to scale, or in establishing the effects of district leadership on student achievement (Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). In the past, the majority of school improvement research has focused on the school as the unit of change and the leadership of the principal as the primary agent of change (Cawelti, 1999; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1999; Ferguson, 1998). This has led many researchers to conclude there is insufficient knowledge about the influence of superintendent leadership

strategies on bringing reform to scale in a high-poverty school district (Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the superintendent's leadership of state-initiated reform in a high-poverty Texas school district that contributed to district wide increases in academic performance. Important insights into the implementation of reform can be discovered by examining the leadership acts and strategies of effective superintendents used to design and implement plans of district-wide restructuring and improvement.

The superintendent's leadership of reform is highly contextual. The superintendents' interpretations of reform policies in relation to the context of their districts shape their responses and the implementation processes they initiate (Wills & Peterson, 1995). How these interpretations shape superintendents' responses to reform is a key to understanding the manner and quality of policy implementation in a school district.

The insights gained from this study can be shared with educational practitioners, researchers, and scholars, and others seeking to gain understanding about how effective superintendents and district leaders establish the conditions for successful implementation of state-initiated reform policies. This study will broaden the base of knowledge about the superintendent's leadership of reform in a high poverty Texas school district, using transforming leadership strategies to leverage change and provide equitable academic success for all students.

With this focus in mind, the research questions were considered.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What were the strategies and leadership acts used by the superintendent to influence change in the district?
2. What was the perceived effectiveness of the superintendent's strategies and leadership acts?
3. How were the strategies and leadership acts linked to student performance?

Research Design

Methodology

The methodology selected by the researcher to collect and analyze data is dependent on the orientation of the researcher and the nature of the problem under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The way the researcher asks the research question and frames the research problem is extremely important because it determines to a large extent the type of research method that is used (p. 36).

Additionally, some areas of research lend themselves to a particular methodology. The use of qualitative research is appropriate to produce and analyze data through nonmathematical procedures that result in findings derived from a variety of data sources (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Qualitative research seeks to gain a deep understanding of the perceptions and behaviors of people in social situations, including those of organizations, groups, and individuals (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It can be used to uncover and understand the nature of human experiences behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known

(Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Further, qualitative methods can provide intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to identify with quantitative methods. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research "assumes that there are multiple realities — that the world is not an objective thing but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring"(p. 17).

Thus, the research questions and focus of this study directed the researcher to select qualitative methodology to investigate the superintendents' leadership of reform in a high-poverty Texas school district. This methodology was determined by the researcher to be necessary to illuminate the complex influences, perceptions, and interactions that intersect in the office of the superintendency in the context of accountability and reform when superintendents' use transformative leadership strategies and the policies of reform to leverage change in their school districts.

This study was consistent with Merriam's (1998) description of the five characteristics of qualitative research. These are:

1) Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world;
2) The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis;

3) Qualitative research usually involves field work;

4) Qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy to build toward theory that adequately explains a phenomenon;

5) Since qualitative research focuses on process, meaning, and understanding, the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive of the phenomenon under study.

Among the many types of qualitative research available are grounded theory, ethnography, the phenomenological approach, and life histories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). While any of these or other approaches could be applicable to a qualitative study of superintendent leadership, the grounded theory method of analysis was chosen as the methodology for this study. A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents, and it is discovered through the use of a systematic set of procedures that is grounded in the data to inductively develop substantive theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The purpose of grounded theory is to build theory that is faithful to and which illuminates the area under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A well-constructed grounded theory will meet four central criteria for judging the applicability of theory to a phenomenon: fit, understanding, generality, and control (p. 23).

The introduction of grounded theory has contributed to growing confidence in the use of qualitative methodology for conducting research.

Grounded theory is considered a scientific method because it incorporates concrete methods for analyzing and conceptualizing data (Miles & Huberman, 1994) which "meet the criteria for "good" science: significance, theory-observation compatibility, generalizability, reproducibility, precision, rigor, and verification" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 27). While the procedures are designed to lend rigor and precision to the analytic process, the methodology also provides the researcher opportunities for creativity. The researcher exercises creativity in naming categories and in making the free associations necessary for generating stimulating questions and for recognizing potential categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Finally, grounded theory is a methodology that enables the researcher to develop substantive theory about the phenomena under investigation.

A single, instrumental case study design was employed to examine the leadership acts and leadership strategies used by the study superintendent in depth and in detail. In this design, a particular case was examined to gain an in-depth understanding of a particular situation and meaning for those involved (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1994). "The interest is in the process rather than the outcomes, in the context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than in confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice, and future research" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). The significance of this study was to broaden the knowledge of what superintendents actually do to

achieve wide-scale school success when implementing state-initiated reform policies.

Site and Participant Selection

Site Selection

In grounded theory, the research questions are statements that identify the phenomenon to be studied and direct the researcher to examine, for example, a particular site where events are occurring or where people are acting (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The primary focus for this study was on the leadership acts of the superintendent. The research questions, then, defined the unit of analysis to be the district superintendent. The superintendent and his school district, hereafter referred to as Mariposa Independent School District (ISD) were selected through the process described below.

Since the Texas accountability system was implemented during the early 1990s, distinction has been earned by a growing number of high-poverty schools where African American and Hispanic students demonstrate high levels of academic proficiency with as much frequency as White students (Johnson, Estes, & Asera, 1997). In a 1996 study of high-performing school districts, based on AEIS performance data, researchers determined that there was an uneven distribution of achievement gains across the state of Texas, especially among schools characterized by high levels of poverty. It was apparent that while many of the high-performing, high-poverty schools were clustered in certain school

districts, there was an absence of these schools in other districts. In order to investigate this phenomenon, a collaborative was formed among the Charles A. Dana Center; The Cooperative Superintendency Program, Department of Educational Administration, The University of Texas at Austin; and the Support for Texas Academic Renewal Center (STAR). This group selected eleven successful high-poverty school districts in Texas to include in their study. The purpose of the study was to identify how school boards and superintendents create, promote, and sustain high-performing schools in high-poverty communities (Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999).

As an outgrowth of the Charles A. Dana Center district effectiveness study, one of the eleven identified school districts was selected as the site for this study. The district was identified on the basis of the following criteria:

1) The district has 65% or more low socio-economic status students;
2) The district has more than 50% of its schools earning a Recognized or Exemplary rating for the past two years on the state's AEIS performance system;
3) The district has between 10,000 and 50,000 Average Daily Attendance (ADA).

The subject of this study, the superintendent of Mariposa ISD, met and/or

exceeded each of the sampling criteria established for selection. District demographic data, description of the site, and student performance data are provided in Chapter Four.

The district and unit of analysis of this study were selected in order to increase understanding of leadership strategies employed by the superintendent of a high poverty school district to implement the state-mandated reform initiatives. There are few examples of school districts across the state in which so many of the district's schools are performing at such high levels of performance. The demographic and economic trends in the school community raised academic challenges to the district in providing appropriate educational services to a predominantly poor student population that includes growing numbers of children with limited English proficiency. In spite of these challenges, the district dramatically increased academic standards and student academic performance over a 6-year period.

Because the dramatic turnaround in Mariposa ISD which appeared to coincide synchronously with the initiation of the new state accountability system and the arrival of the superintendent to the district, this case offered an excellent opportunity to examine the manner in which district leadership used the state policy system to leverage district-wide change and to increase student performance.

According to Immegart (1988, p. 274), case studies are needed to "expand the aspects, dimensions, and variables of leadership, to account more fully for leadership complexity, to examine actual leadership situations, and to expand conceptualizations." Further, Immegart (1988) suggests "the focus of the study of leadership ought to shift clearly to one of leading, or the act of providing leadership. Case study and more rigorous conceptualizations will facilitate movement toward the goal of understanding better what leaders do" (p. 274).

Participant Selection

In an effort to gain a broad view of perceptions within the district regarding the superintendent's leadership of state-initiated reform, staff members representing positions from at a variety of levels of schooling were selected for interviews. The assumption was made that these participants had knowledge of information related to the purpose and research questions of this study. All participants in the study were chosen by a purposive method to be representative of the following criteria: having been an employee of the district on a continuous basis for the previous five years. Participation in this study was voluntary.

Through a purposeful method (Stake, 1994), key members of the central office staff were selected for interview. The following district level leaders were participants in the study: Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Bilingual Education Director/Interim Superintendent, Title I Director, Staff Development Director, Executive Director for Instructional Support, and

Chief Financial Officer. In addition, the Superintendent of the district was interviewed.

The principals interviewed were selected from schools that met the criteria as high-poverty campuses, to include three from each level of instruction (elementary, middle, and high school). One of the high school principals was assigned to lead at an alternative education center in the district. Since all thirty-three elementary schools and all eleven middle schools except one were rated as either recognized or exemplary, and all the high schools were rated acceptable, the principals at each level of instruction were selected from campuses with similar ratings, in most all cases high-performing. In addition, three groups of teachers were purposively selected, one at each level of instruction (elementary, middle, and high school), with six to seven teachers per group, to participate in focus group interviews.

As concepts emerged during the analysis of data, theoretical sampling was employed to further explore the categories, properties, and dimensions of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Additional interviews were conducted with experts from the Texas Education Agency and independent consultants who could provide clarification and historical background on the state accountability system and other components of the reform agenda and/or verify information about the superintendent's leadership of reform in Mariposa ISD. Also, the researcher interviewed the TEA State Master who was assigned to the district by the

Commissioner of Education between the years of 1990-1992. Archival data on record at the Texas Education Agency between the years 1990-1999 were reviewed to gain an historical perspective of the district and to achieve triangulation of data.

Data Collection and Procedures

Instrumentation.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument used to collect and record data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher spent considerable time on site in the study district to build relationships and maintain trust with those from whom information was gained (Filstead, 1980). While in the district, it was helpful to identify, cultivate, and selectively use informants or gatekeepers to provide an "inside view of the norms, attitudes, constructions, processes, and culture that characterize the local setting" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 258).

In addition to the researcher, the following data collection instruments were used in this study: interview protocols, direct observation, and written documents (Patton, 1990).

Interview protocol.

In preparation for conducting a case study, Yin (1984) recommends that case study protocols be developed and that protocols be field-tested. The researcher gained experience and practice developing protocols and interviewing

through two qualitative research classes at The University of Texas and through field practice as a researcher for the Charles A. Dana Center.

Semi-structured, open-ended interview protocols were designed to collect data during face-to-face, taped interviews with each participant. Separate instruments were developed to accommodate the differing perspectives of the superintendent, central office administrators, principals, and teachers. The interviews were scheduled to last for approximately one hour (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990).

Interview protocols were field-tested in a school district with similar characteristics to those of the study district. The purpose of the field test was to clarify interview questions, improve interview techniques, and refine data collection procedures (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a result of the pilot, adjustments in the interview questions and refinements in the process were made, leading to the development of the final interview protocols. These protocol questions appear in the Appendix C of this document.

Observations.

Another method of data collection used in this study was direct observation of meetings and interactions in the district. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 273), direct observation allows the inquirer to see the world as his subjects see it in depth, "to grasp the culture in its own natural, ongoing environment…and to build on tacit knowledge, both his own and that of members

of the group." During this study, a regularly scheduled meeting of central office administrators and principals, a planning meeting for principal leadership development, and a district school board meeting were observed. Also, the researcher observed the superintendent during a presentation to graduate students at The University of Texas at Austin about the implementation of reform in the district. Field notes of observations were recorded during these events and used as one of multiple sources of data to triangulate with data collected during face-to-face interviews with study participants.

Document Review.

A third form of instrumentation used in this study was the collection and analysis of documents and archival records from the school district, the Texas Education Agency, and on-line resources. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe documents and records as useful to the researcher because they are generally a rich, stable source of information that are available at little cost to the researcher and are usually legally unassailable. Many documents and records are by law open to public inspection under the federal Freedom of Information Act. Examples of documents and records from the school district included the five-year district strategic plan, sample campus action plans, reports on student performance data, district newsletters, meeting agendas, and other relevant district publications.

Texas Education Agency archived documents and online publications included AEIS reports, letters from members of the school board, the school community, and staff members from the school district. Additionally, historical data included copies of newspaper articles, reports and letters issued by the Texas Education Master who served in the district from 1990-1992. TEA and district documents on-line resources were used as one method of data collection to provide contextual validation of information gathered during face-to-face interviews or observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Field Journal.

A field journal was maintained and updated during trips to Mariposa ISD to record information from interviews and observations for subsequent analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Face-to-face interviews and focus groups were audio-taped. During telephone interviews and district meetings, notes were taken by the researcher to record interactions and observations in order to provide additional data for analysis and an audit trail of the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Following the selection of the school district site using the specified sampling criteria, telephone contact was made to the superintendent of schools, followed by a formal letter of introduction to the proposed study, to gain access to the district. A signed letter of Agreement to Participate (Appendix A) provided the researcher access to the identified district personnel.

Data collection took place over a period of seven months between September, 1998 and March, 1999. A total of four site visits to the district, each lasting several days, were made to the district between September and December of 1998. The Superintendent was interviewed three times, twice in the fall of 1998 in the school district and, again, in Austin, Texas in October, 1998. Interviews with Central Office members and principals were conducted at the District Administration Building. Additionally, focus groups with teachers were conducted at the elementary, middle school, and high school campuses that were selected to participate in the study.

In grounded theory methodology, the initial questions and interviews provide a beginning focus for the researcher, or a place to start (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Among the advantages to the researcher who uses grounded theory is the freedom to extend data collection beyond the original samples based on discovery of concepts and their relevance to evolving theory. Theoretical sampling is, therefore, used to collect additional data as directed by the logic and aim of the coding procedures and the developing theoretical sensitivity of the researcher. As concepts emerge and the researcher's sensitivity to the theoretical relevance of concepts increases over time, additional sampling allows the researcher to achieve density and saturation of emerging categories.

In this study, additional sampling was required to achieve saturation of emerging categories. In order to gain a broader historical perspective of the

district and the community, a greater understanding of the conflicts and issues that occurred over time, and to verify the emerging story line, it was necessary to discover additional data through subsequent theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Prior to each interview, an overview of the research study was presented, confidentiality assurances provided, and signed consent forms secured from each participant. Each participant was provided a copy of the consent form for his or her personal records (see Appendix B). Permission was also requested to tape record the interview.

Participants were interviewed using protocols that consisted of eight to ten open-ended, guiding questions. All interviews were audio taped, transcribed, and coded. In addition to scheduled interviews in the district, several interviews were conducted with experts from state agencies to gain a broader perspective of the policies of reform and a deeper understanding of the history of the study district. Notes taken during interviews, observations during meetings, and field notes were recorded and interpreted. A running record of analysis and interpretations was maintained. Finally, pertinent archival documents were collected, reviewed, and analyzed to provide for triangulation and trustworthiness of the data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process of making sense out of data. In qualitative data analysis with grounded theory, systematic procedures are designed to provide the

rigor and precision necessary to develop theory that meets the criteria for "good" science (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data analysis using grounded theory is accomplished through coding. According to Strauss and Corbin, "Coding represents the operations by which the data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways" (p. 57). It is the central process by which theories are built from data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). There were three types of coding used in the grounded theory analysis: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

The challenge facing the researcher is to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct frameworks for communicating the essence of what the data revealed (Patton, 1990, 371-372).

Once interviews were completed, the process for analyzing the data began by transcribing the audio taped interviews and coding the transcriptions. An inductive process of open coding was used to analyze the data. Initially, many codes emerged directly from the language of the text. As the analysis progressed and incidents were compared for similarities and differences, codes were repeated to represent recurring concepts. Through open coding, categories were discovered and named as similar concepts became grouped around the properties and dimensions of particular phenomena.

After the completion of open coding, the process of axial coding was used to put the data back together in new ways by making connections between categories and sub-categories in terms of their properties and dimensions. This was accomplished by specifying a category, or phenomenon, in terms of the conditions which give rise to it; the context in which it is embedded; the action/interactional strategies by which it is handled or carried out; and consequences of those strategies (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.96). Axial coding allowed the researcher to examine the phenomenon under study, in this case, the leadership of the superintendent, in relation to the causes and conditions giving rise to it; the context in which it was embedded; and the consequences on district performance and district effectiveness.

Finally, to develop a story for the final report, selective coding was used to integrate the categories into a central story line, or core category, emerging from the study data. The story line moves beyond narrative description to conceptualization of the central phenomenon of the study. The process included selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

HyperRESEARCH© software and a MacIntosh computer were used to facilitate the coding of data and to generate reports electronically. When the coding of each interview was completed, the hand written codes were entered into

HyperRESEARCH© files in order to record, sort, display, and report the data effectively. To create reports, the codes were selected that related to each category, and a report was generated that included the codes and the data strips that supported them. There are a number of advantages for researchers using HyperRESEARCH© technology. It allows the researcher to code any amount of data any number of times; retrieve and manipulate portions of coded source material; test propositions about the data using Boolean searches; and print or export retrieved data to a word processor, spreadsheet, or statistical package for more in-depth analysis. The technology dramatically enhances the rapid and efficient management of data for the qualitative researcher.

Trustworthiness of the Study

All research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe criteria for determining the trustworthiness, or authenticity, of any research study. These criteria are defined and applied to this study in the paragraphs below:

Credibility.

Credibility refers to the integrity of the study that ensures that the findings are true. Triangulation, prolonged engagement, and respondent verification are common techniques used to achieve credibility of the findings. In this study, triangulation of data was achieved through multiple interviews, document review, and observations. As findings emerged through the data collection process, the

emerging concepts, categories, and subcategories were compared with other sources of information to check for agreement or lack of agreement in the data sources. Another source of credibility for this study was achieved through prolonged engagement in the district. The collection of data for this study occurred over a seven-month period. Over time, the researcher used discriminant theoretical sampling of participants, checking the meaning of outliers, documents, and observations of events to secure the maximum opportunities for verifying the story line, the relationships among categories, and to fill in poorly developed categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Transferability.

To ascertain the transferability or generalizability of a study, the researcher or reader will need to know if the conclusions of the study have any larger import or whether they are transferable to other contexts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A limitation of case study research acknowledged by many researchers is that case study is a poor basis for generalization (Stake, 1994). Stake (1994) argues that naturalistic generalizations may be drawn from qualitative case study. Drawing from tacit knowledge, intuition, and personal experience allows people to look for patterns or similarities within case studies that might be applicable in other contexts. It will be left to the reader to determine the generalizability of a study to his or her situation.

To enhance the possibility that the results of this case study were generalizable to other settings, every attempt was made by the researcher to maintain authenticity and adequacy through context-rich, explicit, and meaningful ("thick") descriptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In order to provide enough information readers could use to determine how closely their situations match the research environment, the researcher worked to ensure that the characteristics of the sampling of persons, settings, and processes were fully described (Merriam, 1998). Thus, the results may prove generalizable to those specific situations which prove similar to the district under study.

Confirmability.

Confirmability is the use of techniques in qualitative research to confirm or enhance the verification of the results of the study and to affirm the absence of researcher bias. Techniques used to certify the data included the use of triangulation to corroborate evidence, checking the meaning of outliers, and looking for negative evidence in order to assess the representativeness of the sampled participants. Another technique that served to verify study results was the use of an audit trail to document the multiple sources of data generated from the study (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail included raw data such as taped interviews, transcripts, memos and diagrams, code notes, and journals. These materials contributed to the confidence of the findings.

Chapter Summary

The methodology, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis processes used to conduct this study were outlined in Chapter Three. The purpose of this single case study design was to examine the superintendent's leadership of state-initiated reform in the context of a high-poverty school district. Because little is known about the influence of the superintendent and district leadership on taking reform to scale, it is important to understand the leadership strategies used by the superintendent to leverage change and to create district-wide success for all students. The purpose of the research and the research questions determined the selection of the methodology appropriate for the study. Grounded theory methodology was selected as the appropriate methodology to address the research goals of this study.

Grounded theory methodology incorporates the use of purposive and theoretical sampling procedures for the purpose of collecting data and inductively building theory. In Chapter Three, the criteria for selection of the site, the unit of analysis, and the study participants were described, as well as the sampling procedures that were used in the study. An overview of the technology and HyperRESEARCH© software used to facilitate the coding and management of data electronically was provided. Finally, the techniques used by the researcher to establish and promote trustworthiness of the study were described.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the superintendent's leadership of state-initiated reform in a high-poverty, high-performing school district in Texas. Specifically, the study was designed to identify the leadership strategies and leadership acts employed by the superintendent to implement the state accountability system, to increase student performance throughout the district, and to achieve equity and excellence for all students. The criteria for selection of the district and study participants were as follows:

1. The district has 65% or more low socio-economic status students;
2. The district has more than 50% of its schools earning a Recognized or Exemplary rating for the past two years on state's AEIS performance system;
3. The district has between 10,000 and 50,000 Average Daily Attendance (ADA).

Three research questions served to focus the form and content of this study. The findings generated by these questions are discussed in this chapter. A fictitious name, Mariposa ISD, is substituted for the true name of the district, and codes will be used in lieu of the names of the participants in order to provide anonymity for the participants in the study.

The story of Mariposa ISD is a success story. It is the story of one superintendent, an arrogant, abrasive, and brilliant visionary who implemented the state accountability system and a process of structural and systemic change in Mariposa ISD. Through transformative leadership, he altered the culture of the district, unleashed the power and potential of the personnel, and led the district to achieve dramatic gains in student achievement and high levels of creativity and innovation. It is the story of a school community which, resonating to the challenge and direction of its superintendent, was transformed from a culture of scarcity to a culture of abundance, where every child was valued and expected to succeed at high levels of performance. This research will contribute to the body of knowledge about educational reform and accountability and assist school districts and administrators in understanding the critical role of the superintendent in bringing reform to scale in high poverty school districts through exemplary leadership practices.

District profile

"La oruga a traves de su labor se transforma en mariposa…"

(The cocoon through its labor transforms itself into a butterfly.)

(Author unknown)

In order to build understanding for the context in which this study takes place, a profile of the district and local community is provided. The profile will be presented in the following sections: a) the local community; b) district

demographics; c) district financial condition; d) student performance; e) historical perspective of the district; and f) district governance issues.

Local community.

Mariposa ISD is an urban school district located within the city limits of a large border community on the western tip of Texas. Situated across the border from Mexico, the school community is part of a growing bi-national metropolitan area and rated as one of the fastest growing cities in the nation. Although the city population numbers 591,600, the total metropolitan area includes over 1.5 million inhabitants (DOC 1, p. 2).

The city embracing Mariposa ISD has long served as an entry port between Mexico and the United States. It has recently undergone major growth in economic development, employment, and housing due to the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and to the designation of the community as a Free Enterprise Zone. Historically one of the poorest communities in the country, the city has identified eight neighborhoods as distressed areas due to substandard housing and lack of economic development. Four of these neighborhoods are located in Mariposa ISD. Following the passage of NAFTA, the city developed plans to break the poverty cycle with the creation of new employment centers on land bordering the impoverished neighborhoods. As a result, the school district is receiving growing numbers of limited English proficient students as immigrants from Mexico are attracted to the city by the

promise of employment and a flourishing economy. Despite the recent upswing of the city's economy, the unemployment rate is between 10 and 11 percent, and 30 percent of the adult population is functionally illiterate (DOC 1: p. 2-3).

District demographics.

With an enrollment of nearly 47,000 students and a staff of approximately 6,000 employees in seven high schools, eleven middle schools, thirty-five elementary schools, eight alternative schools, and nine drop-out recovery centers, Mariposa ISD is one of the eight largest school districts in the state. It is also one of three urban school districts located within the boundaries of a large, west Texas border community. The demographic trends of the city's general population are reflected in the student population of the Mariposa ISD where student enrollment figures demonstrate a growing ethnic majority. In 2003, the ethnic make-up of the student population was as follows: 89.4 percent Hispanic, 7.4 percent White, 2.3 percent African American, and less than 1 percent Other (DOC 17, p. 1). Since 1997, the Hispanic population has increased by 5 percent. Approximately 79 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch price in 2003, and 23.8 percent were limited English proficient (DOC 17, Section II, p. 1).

District financial condition.

A review of the district financial data in 2003 revealed annual expenditures of $316,413,256 and an annual revenue of $314,335,997 (DOC 17, pp. Section II, p. 4). Mariposa ISD is considered to be a property poor school

district since the taxable property wealth per pupil in 2003 was $93,786 per pupil in contrast to a state average of $242,809 per pupil (DOC 17, Section II, p. 4). As a result of the state plan for equalization of funding, Tier II funds are shifted from wealthy to poor school districts in order to partially overcome the effects of a low property tax base and distribute tax revenues more equitably across the state.

In Mariposa ISD, approximately 80 percent of the district's revenues were generated from a combination of state and federal funds in 2003. The state average for local contribution to total district revenues was 67.4 percent as compared with the 19.8 percent that the district of Mariposa contributed to the education of its children. In spite of the additional revenues generated through the state equalization plan, the total per pupil expenditures in Mariposa ISD were $6,780 compared with average state expenditures of $7,088 per pupil.

Student performance.

Mariposa ISD demonstrated remarkable success in improving student achievement according to measures of performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), the statewide assessment system from 1994-2002. Overcoming challenging social and economic circumstances, Mariposa ISD became the first urban school district in Texas to receive Recognized status in 1998 and has continued to show a steady increase in performance each subsequent year (DOC 17, p. 1). Table 1 (see p. 108) demonstrates the gains in accountability ratings for district campuses over a nine-year period, from 1993

through 2002. Table 2 (p. 109) illustrates dramatic achievement gains in the content areas of reading, writing, and mathematics for all students groups from 1994 through 2002. The performance data also indicate the achievement gap among student populations has been virtually eliminated in all content areas (DOC 17, pp. 1-2; DOC 18, pp. 17-18). The gains in achievement were a result of focused efforts at individual campuses along with the assistance and support of a restructured central office.

History of Campus Accountability Ratings										
	1993	**1994**	**1995**	**1996**	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**
Exemplary	0	0	0	0	2	11	8	12	9	13
Recognized	0	1	8	15	22	33	20	30	34	32
Acceptable	42	48	41	36	27	7	4	9	8	6
Low Performing	7	0	0	0	0	0	19*	0	0	1*

* Data Issues

Table 1. Campus Accountability Ratings, 1993-2002

Historical perspective of the district.

The Mariposa Common School District was created by the County Commissioner Court in 1925 and matriculated its first high school graduates in 1926 (DOC 4: p. 2). By 1929, the district expanded to two buildings, one housing high school students and the other, elementary students. In 1937, the common school district became an independent school district. The superintendent who

District TAAS Results for Mariposa I.S.D.

1994 and 2002 Results, Grades 3-10

TAAS Reading Scores – Percent Passing				
Student Group	**1994**	**2002**	**District Gains**	**State Gains**
African American	76.1	92.9	+16.8	+26.5
Hispanic	69.3	90.3	+21.0	+22.0
White	86.1	96.3	+9.6	+9.1
Economically Disadvantaged	41.7	84.6	+42.9	+23.1

TAAS Math Scores – Percent Passing				
Student Group	**1994**	**2002**	**District Gains**	**State Gains**
African American	51.5	92.6	41.1	48.4
Hispanic	50.2	94.4	44.2	43.0
White	70.9	96.9	26.0	23.2
Economically Disadvantaged	48.5	93.9	45.4	43.9

TAAS Writing Scores – Percent Passing				
Student Group	**1994**	**2002**	**District Gains**	**State Gains**
African American	79.0	88.9	+9.9	+18.7
Hispanic	71.7	89.8	+18.1	+14.1
White	84.9	94.7	+9.8	+6.3
Economically Disadvantaged	68.9	88.7	+19.8	+15.0

Table 2 1994 and 2002 TAAS Results, Grades 3-10

(http://www.tea.state.tx. us/)

led the district during this transition remained to serve a total of 50 years as the district leader of Mariposa ISD. After his resignation in 1980, a rapid succession of superintendents followed over the next twelve years, and the district entered an era of social upheaval and political ferment (DOC 5, p. 1).

During this period of divisiveness, the district changed to single member districts as the community sought a stronger voice in the operation of the schools. Under this new governance structure, board members aggressively promoted the interests of their separate districts and ceased to function as a unified body to represent the entire district in a fair and equitable manner. Also, the board engaged in serious acts of micromanaging the district and made decisions that compromised the financial stability of the school district (DOC 3; DOC 11).

Over a period of 10-15 years, the district experienced a downward slide in academic achievement. According to one central office administrator:

> Very little was expected of students, and students gave very little. Very little was expected of parents, and parents gave very little. And, furthermore, the greatest tragedy of all was that very little in terms of performance was expected of staff, so the staff gave very little (INT 10:2:44).

The major source of the academic decline was traced to "the absence of leadership" and the dysfunctional nature of governance in the district (INT 10:2:39; DOC 1, pp. 1-3; DOC 2, p. 2; DOC 3).

District governance issues.

Growing governance problems reached crisis proportions in the 1990-1991 school year following an accreditation visit to Mariposa ISD by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The accreditation report cited the district for several deficiencies in the area of student performance, compounded by serious problems related to governance and planning (DOC 6, p. 1). The report pointed to the failure of the Board of Education to recognize its role as a policy-making body and to separate its responsibilities from those of the superintendent (DOC 2, p. 2). As a result, in the fall of 1991, the Commissioner of Education in Texas assigned a monitor to assist the district in addressing the identified deficiencies (DOC 6, p. 1-2).

A significant factor contributing to the governance and academic problems of Mariposa ISD was the negative climate in the surrounding school community. The community was deeply divided over issues related to the school board and the school district, and feelings of antagonism about the school district were expressed publicly by members of the community (INT 10:8:176-183). Factions coalesced and polarized around issues related to race, gender, ethnicity and geographical neighborhoods of the community. Among the sources of dissatisfaction was the perception that different races and disenfranchised groups of people in the school community were denied equitable access to quality educational opportunities, well-maintained facilities and resources, and

employment due to discriminatory practices, lack of leadership, and inefficient management of resources within the school district (INT 21:2:29-35).

The local newspaper published a statement from the Commissioner of Education in the State of Texas expressing concern "at the lack of cooperation among trustees and the growing discontent among elements in the community" (DOC 11, p.1). The Commissioner warned that he would be closely watching the "often tempestuous relationships among school board members and between the school district and the community" (DOC 12, p.1)

Under the guidance of the TEA monitor, the Board forced the existing superintendent to retire and hired a new superintendent in January of 1992. In correspondence to the Commissioner related to the search and selection process, the monitor used strong words to describe the new superintendent, including "visionary, a motivator, a strong leader, student-oriented, and a change agent" (DOC 7, p. 3). Further, the monitor expressed hope that the district would stabilize under the direction of the new superintendent.

Despite new leadership and the efforts of the TEA monitor, the Board continued to violate the improvement plans called for in the accreditation report. The Assistant Commissioner of Texas Education Agency wrote the members of the school board in December of 1991:

> It has come to my attention that the Board is not fully cooperating with the monitor. The trustees have not followed his advice and recommendations.

…..Be advised that the Commissioner of Education shall not permit the present conduct of the Board to continue. Ongoing reluctance on the part of the Board of Trustees to fully cooperate with the monitor shall result in the upgrading of the monitor to a master" (DOC 13, p. 1).

In June of 1992, the Commissioner of Education took further action to rectify the situation in the district by upgrading the status of monitor to that of master. In a letter to the school board of Mariposa ISD, the Commissioner explained that assigning a master to a school district was the most serious action that could be taken against a district, short of recommending to the State Board of Education the withdrawal of accreditation and termination of state support (DOC 8, pp. 1-2). This last action of the Commissioner appeared to gain the attention of the Board.

In October 1992, after considerable negotiation, the Board entered into a formal agreement with the superintendent and pledged to do the following:

> The Board agrees to uphold ethical standards that promote the best interests of students, employees, and the community, to restore the district to its fully accredited status, and to eliminate the conditions which prompted the Commissioner of Education to appoint a monitor and later elevate the monitor to the role of master (DOC 10, pp. 1-6).

In their agreement, the Board members pledged to refrain from interfering in the day-to-day operations of the district, from visiting campuses, or talking to district

personnel without first notifying the superintendent (DOC 10, pp. 1-6; DOC 9; DOC 12). Subsequent reports from the TEA master reflected steady improvement of the district in all three areas of deficiency – governance, planning, and student achievement (DOC 15, p. 1).

Ultimately, in December of 1992, the Commissioner acted to remove the master from the Mariposa ISD (DOC 16, pp. 1-2). The new superintendent, with support from a newly-committed school board, set upon a course of action that altered the district's organizational structure, its culture, and the academic performance of its students.

Research Question One

What were the leadership acts and strategies used by the superintendent to influence change in the district?.

The new superintendent of Mariposa ISD encountered challenging circumstances upon his entry into the district in February of 1992. As described previously, serious issues of governance and low academic performance threatened the district's accreditation status and created an urgent mandate for decisive action and strong leadership. The data collected in the study of Mariposa ISD will demonstrate that from the point of his entry into the district and continuing over the next seven years, the new superintendent used a variety of leadership acts and strategies to transform the district from a critical condition of low performance to the highly valued rating of a "recognized" school district. All

data point directly to the leadership of the superintendent as the catalyst for change and the initiator of the transformative practices which lead the district to success.

In this study, leadership act is defined as a category or group of related strategies employed by leaders for the purpose of obtaining a preferred outcome (Foster, 1986). Strategy is defined as a broad category or group of related tactics used for the purpose of obtaining one's preferred outcome (Owen, 1997). During the interviews, the terms "leadership acts" and "strategies" were found to be confusing and were used interchangeably by study participants even after definitions were provided. Through the repeated process of pulling data apart and reconnecting it through the coding and analysis of "what the superintendent did" using grounded theory methodology, categories emerged and enabled the researcher to more accurately identify the leadership acts which were used and the contributing strategies that led to the desired results.

Six broad leadership acts used by the superintendent to influence change in the district emerged from the data. These leadership acts were focused on conditions and pressures for change existing both within and external to the district. The data revealed that specific strategies were employed by the superintendent in order to complete the acts of leadership. For organizational purposes, the strategies were grouped under the six leadership acts:

Act I: Establishing an Agenda for Change.

The first set of actions taken by the superintendent upon his entry into the district in February, 1992, was to assess the condition of the organization, to analyze the issues and concerns of the district and the school community, and to plan an approach to change. According to the superintendent, his approach was "Get out there and find out what you have to work with. Take on an issue and immediately put your stamp on the district and from there you can take on the leadership" (INT 6:3:384). The superintendent employed two strategies to establish an agenda for change. The strategies included: 1) assessing district needs; and 2) identifying needs and pressures for change in order to leverage a plan for change in the district.

Strategy 1: Assessing district needs.

The board granted the new superintendent a full month at the beginning of his contract, "unencumbered from duties as the chief executive," for a period of observation, research, and assessment (INT 2:4:63-64; INT 6:8:296). Members of the central office staff, principals, and the TEA master assigned to the district confirmed that the superintendent used the time to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the district operations, finances, and personnel (INT 2:4:5-6; INT 10:19:430; INT 12:7:152). He examined the low academic performance of the district campuses as well as the physical condition of the facilities (INT 12:10:7-8). Interview data indicated that he familiarized himself with the state policy

environment and the external mandates for change. He met with the school staff of each of the fifty-six campuses as well as the members of each of the district departments (INT 6:8:303-309).

During his assessment of district operations, the superintendent learned that the organizational structure of roles and responsibilities in Mariposa ISD was traditional and bureaucratic with several layers of personnel between front line employees at the campus level and the senior level administrators at the district level. It was noted in all interviews with teachers, principals, and central office administrators that a top-down approach to leadership characterized district operations in 1992 (INT 25:1:7-9).

For example, the instructional division of the district central office was heavily staffed with content area supervisors and curriculum specialists who attempted to manage and supervise teachers across a sprawling urban district, from the central office level (INT 25:1:5-7). Teachers interacted infrequently with other professionals and, for the most part, performed autonomously in their classrooms behind "closed doors," while new teachers, without direction or support, "floundered through" for a few years "trying to figure out what the kids needed" (INT 22:1:17-27). Although campus principals shared the responsibility for teacher evaluations with the supervisors, they were primarily managers of their buildings with limited control over staff development, personnel, and instruction (INT 4:8:189-199; INT 9:18:524-528). Due to the size of the district,

the span of control proved to be unconscionable for central office administrators to provide adequate supervision and support for teachers. As a result, teachers reported a feeling of isolation and the absence of effective instructional support at district campuses (INT 22:1:5-35; INT 25:1:7-9).

Further, the superintendent met with members of the community including parents, business leaders, ministers, the police, and civic leaders to gain a "first-hand assessment" of the issues at hand (INT 6:9:306-309). During these meetings, he assessed the sources of discontent and dissatisfaction within the school community and encouraged parents, community members and business leaders to take greater responsibility for the education of the children in the district (INT 10:4:78-85). While assessing the district needs, the superintendent reported that he formed strong opinions about developing district priorities for change and the leadership strategies that would be required to reverse the direction of the district and to build community support (INT 6:7:261-290).

One of the first areas of dissatisfaction, expressed both by the staff and by members of the community-at-large, that captured the attention and imagination of the superintendent was the poor physical condition of the school facilities (INT 17:9:216-222). According to the new superintendent,

> The biggest sore spot around here was the condition of the buildings. That was the one common deficiency that everyone agreed on. So the first place I went was the construction and maintenance division. What I found

> out was there was a reason why the buildings were deficient — because we had a big overblown bureaucracy there that did not know what they were doing and a work force of people who had skills but they were being mismanaged (INT 6:8:274-281).

Principals and teachers described the deplorable state of the facilities in 1992. Some comments follow: "The building was like a war zone when I was transferred there" (INT 18:27:20). "Buildings needed paint, dressing rooms, and lockers" (INT 17:9:217). "Even the floors had mismatched tiles" (INT 1:1:16).

The condition of school facilities in 1992, as described during the interviews, reflected inequities in the school community. The district was divided along a natural boundary line into two regions—one north, and the other south, of the Interstate Highway that ran parallel to the border into Mexico. According to teachers, principals, and central office administrators, the schools to the north of the Interstate were allocated greater resources, were better maintained, and served students in more affluent neighborhoods than the schools in the southern valley where the schools were older, substandard, and served students living in poor neighborhoods. According to one principal, and verified by teacher participants, "The North got and the South did not" (DOC 22:2:2; INT 25:1:25-26).

Teachers, principals, and central office administrators also verified that prior to 1992, budgets were allocated and personnel positions assigned through a subjective process in which the principals who "argued their cases" more

persuasively received more money (INT 24:5:180-184; INT 12:5:111; INT 25:1:25-27; DOC 24:5:180). The disparity in resources among schools in the northern and southern parts of the district, according to one central administrator, "sadly enough, was accepted as the norm" (INT 12:5:111).

The impoverished condition of the school facilities became a metaphor used by the superintendent to illustrate a prevalent belief system in the district about the learning potential of poor Hispanic children. The superintendent alternately referred to this paradigm as a "culture of deprivation" or the *pobrecito syndrome*, and used it to describe a deficit model of thinking "commonly found in poor, urban districts" where members of the staff held low expectations for the performance potential of poor, Hispanic children (INT 7:2:1-13). According to one building principal, the *pobrecito* mentality included a perception that limited resources and substandard facilities were adequate for "these poor children" (INT 21:2:27).

Interview respondents widely confirmed the pervasiveness of the above-described belief system in the district. One principal described it this way: "I think it's just a universal attitude, especially if you come from a middle class background, it's 'those poor kids.' They don't have the background, they don't speak English, they don't learn, and it had to do with the beliefs of our people about students" (INT 18:8:2-5). Another said, "At one time it was acceptable that

minority students do not do well. Really it had to do with the beliefs of our people about students" (INT 20:3:66-69).

This deficit model of thinking not only embraced the notion that limited resources and substandard facilities were adequate for poor children, but that the district was poor and lacked the resources to provide salary increases for its employees and better facilities and resources for the students (INT 5:2:1-6; INT 12:3:51-53).

Strategy 2: Identifying needs and pressures for change

Findings that emerged from interviews with all respondents revealed a variety of needs and forces both external and internal to the district at the superintendent's point of entry into the district. Evidence revealed the following conditions and pressures that created the need for change and formed the targets for the superintendent's restructuring plan:

- A culture of deprivation – impoverished students, impoverished facilities;
- A climate of low expectations for student and staff performance;
- An ineffective, top-heavy, organizational structure;
- An ineffective span of control;
- A negative climate in the school community stemming from perceived inequities in educational opportunities for disenfranchised groups of students;
- A lack of leadership within the school district;

- Significant problems of governance and low academic performance which resulted in the assignment of a TEA master to assist the district in addressing identified deficiencies;
- State-initiated reform policies mandating decentralization and accountability.

Together, the issues and needs identified above equipped the new superintendent with powerful levers for change. Solutions to the identified needs and pressures formed the basis for a restructuring plan of reform used by the superintendent to improve the district performance. The restructuring plan, as documented through all interviews with district employees, and district plans for improvement included the following components:

1. Creating an organizational focus on student performance;
2. Building shared beliefs and a culture of success;
3. Organizational restructuring of roles, responsibilities, and relationships;
4. Decentralization of authority: site-based management;
5. Linking internal and external systems of Accountability.

Act II: Transforming District Culture.

In Mariposa ISD, the visionary leadership of the superintendent was widely regarded by teachers, principals, and administrators as the catalyst for change that transformed the district from a culture of deprivation to a culture of

abundance and success. The transformation began when it became clear to principals, teachers, and administrators, upon the arrival of the new superintendent, that he brought with him a different set of beliefs and expectations for both students and staff (INT 14:1:22-24). The three strategies which emerged from the data employed by the superintendent to transform district culture were: 1) insisting on shared beliefs about the learning potential of poor, Hispanic children; 2) financing a district-wide building program; and 3) promoting creativity and innovation throughout the organization.

Strategy 1: Insisting on shared beliefs.

Insisting on a system of shared beliefs emerged as a strategy used by the superintendent to transform district culture. Central office administrators and principals confirmed that, prior to the arrival of the new superintendent, the prevailing belief system among members of the school community was poor Hispanic and language minority children could not be expected to perform at high levels (INT 21:2:26-28; INT 20:3:66-69). In contrast, according to one administrator, the superintendent brought to the district a different perspective:

> He started out with this belief that all kids can and will achieve at high levels, no exceptions, and no excuses. More importantly, the adults were going to be accountable and you cannot blame students or parents for failure because the kids didn't teach themselves. If the kids are failing, it's because we're not doing our job (INT 15:2:24-27).

In order to implement this "no excuses" philosophy, the superintendent looked for sources of support among district personnel. He began assessing the beliefs of district personnel, to identify those "silent partners" who shared similar beliefs and values to his own (INT 6:8:266). According to the superintendent:

> I had to count on the fact that there are a certain number of people out there — people who want to do what you would like for them to do, believe what you believe, but they haven't had that opportunity. You have to make that assessment (INT 6:7-8:262-267).

A central office administrator explained that in order to assess the beliefs of district employees about student learning, the superintendent asked the staff "tough questions" about "why they were doing certain things" and "why they were accepting low performance from their students" (INT: 14:1:14-17). Based on this assessment, the superintendent began to move people around in the district, placing people who shared similar beliefs and values to his own in key leadership positions and removing those who held dissimilar views from positions of authority (INT 10:11:230-237; INT 15:2:31-34). As he assessed the beliefs of principals and central office administrators, the superintendent communicated to them his expectations for a shared belief system throughout the district. He also expected campus administrators to ensure that teachers and support staff accepted the new belief system (INT 10:3:55-57; INT 15:2:43-44). According to a central office administrator, "The climate began to change so that administrators were not

allowed to make excuses in this district. There would be no more talk about the misery index, or talk about how these kids can't do this or that" (INT 15:1:17-20).

The superintendent's expectations for a shared belief system were prescriptive and inflexible, permitting no opinions but his own. A central office administrator explained that while the new expectations were warmly received by a segment of district staff members, in many cases, the new beliefs were "hard on people" (INT 15:2:26-27). Another central office administrator suggested:

> I think he [the superintendent] made it known that if you didn't share those beliefs then you didn't belong to the system. And we did have quite a number of teachers leaving and he has said it himself, a lot of very good teachers, very efficient teachers. However, they just would not accept those beliefs, and they left (INT 20:6:120).

The administrator summarized the superintendent's aggressive strategy to insist on shared beliefs:

> First of all, he used the restructuring of central office as a key way to move people out who didn't believe in the children. And, I don't know to what degree it was his plan to do that, but certainly the downsizing of central office, the restructuring of the elementary and secondary divisions into vertical teams, all of that moved out people who had been in power, who had key positions, and who didn't see the vision the way he saw it. And they moved out, they retired, they went to other districts. Some

of them may have stayed a year or two in another position, but I think we got maybe 50% turnover in administration in the last six years and two thirds of the teaching staff (INT 15:2:34-43).

Strategy 2: Financing a building program.

"If you can rebuild a building, you can rebuild a district."

The Superintendent

Recognizing that the belief system of the staff, not the life circumstances of the student, was the factor that limited the learning potential of poor Hispanic children, the new superintendent determined that, "if we were going to change," he had to do something dramatic and relevant to challenge the mental models in the school district, to rebuild pride in the school community, and to bind the district in the pursuit of unified goals (INT 5:2:1-4). According to the superintendent, in order to transform the district culture from "a culture of deprivation to a culture of abundance and success, there had to be a physical demonstration that we were not poor" (INT 5:2:5-6).

Therefore, according to central administrators and building principals, within two months after his arrival and after completing an initial assessment of district facilities, "the superintendent took steps to restructure the district debt and fund a major building project" (INT 10:13:286-295; DOC 24:3:99-114; DOC 25:3:124-128). By refinancing the district's long-term debt at a lower interest rate, the district reduced the debt from $14 million to $7 million and freed up

approximately $7 million for technology needs. At that time, the district also increased taxes about $.09, which generated approximately $10 million for construction projects on an annual basis. A central office finance office stated, "This set technology and construction for the future" (DOC 25:2:90-91). The superintendent asserted that, after assessing district needs, he believed the construction project was a strategy everyone would unilaterally support (INT 6:9:311). The building program, according to the superintendent, became a visible, concrete symbol of success to the school community — physical evidence that there was plenty of money in Mariposa ISD:

> Before I came, the state said that this high school needed to be shut down, and they were right. It was very out of shape. I discovered that many of the faculty had attended Mariposa High School, which is the oldest high school in the district. The important thing is that the community had very little pride, very little self-esteem. I made a determination that we were we not going to tear it down, but we were going to restore it — and with our own workers. So in the first summer I was here we tore the place apart and rebuilt it, and we publicized it a lot. We had assembly lines of workers taking those old windowpanes with the wavy lines and restoring them by hand, so there was tremendous alumni and community pride in the project. That school became the central focus for this rebuilding. We

began a program that has been a constant symbol of progress in the district (INT 7:2:51-74).

A synchronous circumstance in the state policy environment in 1992 that supported the superintendent's building program was recent legislation to implement equalization of funding in Texas school districts. State equalization of funding, known as the Robin Hood Plan, shifted wealth from property rich school districts to property poor districts in order to equalize per pupil expenditures across the state. Recognizing the opportunity presented by the equalization plan, the superintendent utilized the funding and the state policy environment to restore public confidence in the financial stability of the school district (DOC 25:p. 3). He communicated regularly the following message to staff members and the public:

> I remember, when I got my contract, my thought was this is a poor school district. But there is no such thing as a poor school district in Texas when you talk about the income. They may be poor in valuations, but because of the equalization that has come to Texas — there is no such thing as poor school districts any more (INT 5:1:6-9).

Strategy 3: Promoting creativity and innovation.

Soon after his arrival, the superintendent implemented a strategy intended to revitalize and transform district culture by facilitating opportunities for district employees to exercise creativity and innovation in Mariposa ISD (DOC 24:4:140-

143). Believing that "Everybody has talent, it's just a question of releasing it," the superintendent modeled the way by initiating a number of unique, innovative programs and by encouraging experimentation in a risk-free environment (INT 6:1:3-4). As one principal said, "There was a push toward innovation and creativity by the new superintendent — we were encouraged to find new ways of doing things" (INT 8:7:159-160). One central office administrator stated,

> He gives you the latitude to be creative and try new things without the fear of consequences. He tells us, 'I figure if you do it wrong, you are not going to do it the same way again' (DOC 26:7:387-392).

To promote innovation in the district, the superintendent funneled ample resources and technical support from central office to creative initiatives and programs that offered promising practices to support student achievement. These actions were consistent with a focus on increasing student performance but were attached to a clear imperative to achieve results. As one principal verified, "He will support anything anyone wants to do as long as it will improve student success" (INT 3:7:291-300).

Act III: Creating a Shared Vision.

According to Bennis and Nanus (1985, p. 89), who characterized vision as "a target that beckons," leaders transform organizations by channeling the collective energies of the staff in the pursuit of a shared vision. Vision is important because it creates a picture in everyone's mind a common image of the

attainable, future state of the organization; infuses meaning and purpose into the workplace; and, according to Sergiovanni (1992, p. 102), "establishes the basis for a covenant of values to which all stakeholders can subscribe."

In order to address the district's climate of low expectations and to mobilize the district in pursuit of high performance ratings according to the state accountability system, the superintendent employed leadership acts to build a shared organizational vision of high expectations for student and staff performance. Emerging from the data were two closely related strategies used by the superintendent to build a shared vision. The strategies included: 1) setting high expectations for students and staff; and 2) creating a focus on student performance results.

Strategy 1: Setting high expectations.

Evidence from all interviews confirmed that when the superintendent was hired to lead Mariposa ISD, he had very clear ideas about focusing the district on performance and about creating a vision of high expectations for student and staff (INT 14:1:14-16). According to study participants, the superintendent intentionally set performance expectations at the highest possible levels as a lever to drive up test scores. In his communications with the staff and school community about his expectations for student performance, the superintendent stated repeatedly, "We will be an exemplary school district. That's not a goal, that's what we are going to do!!" (INT 7:13:329-330; INT 16:26:785-786). In

describing his heightened expectations for the performance of district staff members, the superintendent stated, "My job is to get ordinary people to do extraordinary things" (INT 6:7:222).

The superintendent frequently used metaphors and slogans to punctuate his vision of success and to continuously refocus the staff on the expectations. The standard of excellence for student performance set by the superintendent, and commonly repeated by staff members as the preferred measure of success, was *100 by 100.* A campus principal explained the meaning of *100 by 100*: "H*e* wants 100% of the students performing at 100% mastery" (INT 8:8:190-191). A central office administrator elaborated: "That's got to be the goal – every kid has to receive the maximum of 100% because 70% passing isn't enough" (INT 15:4:66-71). As one central office administrator stated, "Everyone understands that it's about the performance of <u>all</u> students. These may be clichés to you, but that is our expectation" (INT 13:12:259-260). The superintendent consistently applied the *100 by 100* standard as the district's preferred measure of success:

> We reduced the number of kids dropping out of school from 1500 to less than 400 last year. That means about two-thirds improvement. Everyone is saying, 'Isn't that wonderful?' I say, yes, it is, but there are still 400 kids dropping out of school. What if it was your child in that group of 400? We have to strive for 100% (INT 6:4:116-121).

In describing how the superintendent communicated with staff members

and brought them to share in his vision for success, one central office employee described the superintendent's unique ability to clarify the issues. As an effective and forceful communicator, the superintendent was able to identify and articulate sensitive subjects that had previously remained unspoken, causing people to confront and conceptualize the issues:

> When the superintendent arrived, he was the first superintendent to talk about beliefs, about issues of ethnicity and language, about expectations, and he very clearly developed the vision statement. In his second year, he talked to [campus administrators in] every feeder pattern and unpacked the vision statement word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, to demonstrate what each word meant. He made it clear that it meant *all* students. He said it doesn't mean all *except* one or more particular students. It means every one of them. When he talked about college preparedness, he made it clear that the staff were not the decision-makers, the students would be. It was our job to prepare them, not to track them into certain options. Our job is to make sure they have the tools they need to go to college should they choose to go. He expects students to perform well, to be well prepared, and to be competitive with students from schools anywhere. So the vision statement was not developed jointly. It was *literally imposed.* And whether a person chose to believe it was not an option. If you were to be an employee of this district, you had to believe it and then act accordingly.

If you didn't share those beliefs, then you didn't belong to the system (INT 20:4:77-97).

Strategy 2: Creating a focus on performance.

A second strategy used to build a shared vision was to create a focus on performance. According to all respondents, in developing his vision for the district, the superintendent shifted the focus of the entire organization from compliance monitoring to a focus on results, and ultimately on the quality of student instruction. Results in the district, according to all participants, were measured primarily according to student performance on TAAS and the state accountability ratings. From the onset, everyone in the organization, from the bus driver to the superintendent, was expected to define his/her role in relation to how they could individually support student achievement (INT 4:7:26-28).

Interviews with principals, administrators, and teachers verified there was universal clarity about the content of the vision statement. Clearly, the superintendent was the architect of the vision, and received credit from staff members for crystallizing the vision into a succinct but powerful statement that held deep implications for the district (DOC 10: p. 4).

The vision statement was based upon the belief that all students in Mariposa ISD will learn and all students will perform at high levels, regardless of their economic condition. The statement read: *All students will graduate fully bilingual, prepared to enter a four-year college or university.* The vision was

used by the superintendent to create coherence, unity of purpose, and shared values across the system as a means to improve student achievement. From the superintendent's perspective, the achievement goal established in the vision statement was the driver of all instructional decisions to improve student learning:

> The achievement goal is repeated in the vision statement, that all students who enter school here will graduate from high school. That immediately set off several kinds of actions—dropout prevention programs, better counseling, changes in high school scheduling. Then the second part says, prepared to enter a four-year college or university. We immediately changed the graduation requirements and went to four years of required college preparatory math, science, social studies, and English. That was before the state came in with their accelerated curriculum. So now it was essential that everybody pull together to get the kids through those courses using summer school, tutorial programs, and other resources to make sure that every kid graduated. And we're not there yet. Soon we're going to be at the point that hardly any kid doesn't graduate because of the TAAS. So that encompassed everything—the vision statement drove everything (INT 7:11:284-296).

Act IV. Restructuring the District Organization.

In 1992, the new superintendent was charged by TEA and the Board of Education with the responsibility for addressing the district's condition of low

performance. During a brief period of assessment, the superintendent discovered several things about the district organizational structure. First, he determined the central organizational structure to be an ineffective and inefficient system for improving student achievement (INT 13:10:217-230; INT 15:7:152-154). Additionally, according to the superintendent, among the factors contributing to low performance were a "top-heavy, bureaucratic administration," a large span of control, ineffective supervision and support, and isolation of classroom teachers (INT 22:1:17-25; INT 22:6:151-153; INT 25:1:10-12). This assessment, along with the state mandate to decentralize, provided the superintendent the justification for a revolutionary restructuring plan in Mariposa ISD to provide support for the improvement of student achievement on district campuses (INT 8:2:30-46). Data demonstrated that the superintendent employed three strategies to restructure the district organization: reorganizing the central office; redefining roles, responsibilities, and relationships of its members; and creating systems of communication.

Strategy 1: Reorganizing the central office.

The first strategy used to restructure the district was to reorganize the district central office. A focus group of teachers recalled that in 1993, after issuing reports to the district that central office was "top-heavy," the superintendent unilaterally initiated a process to downsize and "flatten" central office and reorganize the roles and responsibilities of central office administrators

(INT 22:6:151-153). During the reorganization, authority for decision-making previously held by central office administrators was devolved to the campuses, to those who were closest to the level of the students (INT 22:6:153-158).

A central office administrator reported that the superintendent's rationale for flattening, downsizing, and decentralizing the organization was to reduce the layers, and therefore the obstruction, between the principals and the superintendent (INT 15:7:152-154) and to streamline the organization for greater efficiency (INT 5:3:13-14). A central office director stated, "He downsized central office; he combined some departments, and the monies and resources went into the schools which is where they were needed to assist in upgrading student achievement" (INT 10:11:249-253).

Additionally, the superintendent and central leadership determined that if principals were to be held accountable for the performance of their campuses, they should be empowered with decision-making authority over the factors that lead to student success – budget, personnel, and programs (INT 15:7:148; INT 16:7:187). Finally, the superintendent intended to restructure roles and responsibilities of central office from supervision and compliance monitoring to an effective system of service and support for the district campuses.

During the restructuring process, as confirmed by a central office administrator, the superintendent dissolved the instructional divisions of elementary and secondary education, eliminated supervisory positions, and

reassigned content area specialists and supervisors to work on one of four newly organized vertical teams, called Assessment and Support Teams (INT 13:1:16-23). Another central office administrator suggested, "There was a pragmatic reason for creating four teams — we had to accommodate all these people that no longer had jobs after the instructional division was reorganized" (INT 15:9:203-205).

The Assessment and Support Teams, each consisting of seven to ten support "generalists," reported to a team leader, or Executive Director for Instructional Support. Each team was assigned to work with one or more clusters of district campuses. A cluster consisted of several campuses, organized vertically along feeder patterns, and a feeder pattern consisted of one high school and several feeder middle and elementary schools.

The superintendent received credit for creating the basic structure and function of the Assessment and Support Teams although the process and details for implementation was developed and refined by members of the central office leadership team (INT 13:10:222-223; INT 15:9:192-200; INT 15:12:256-260). The superintendent conceived the notion of the Assessment and Support Teams as he and other central office leaders participated in training to prepare the district leadership team for a TEA accreditation visit. During an accreditation visit, an external evaluation team enters the school district and makes recommendations

for the improvement of low-performing campuses (INT 13:2:37-40). A central office administrator explained that,

> The superintendent felt strongly that it is one thing to have an external evaluation team come in and leave recommendations, but it would be quite another if the district staff were a part of the evaluation team that would make the recommendations to campuses on how to improve — especially if we were the ones left behind to do the work" (INT 13:2:40-44; INT 17:2:75-82).

For this reason, the superintendent negotiated an arrangement with TEA to allow central office staff members to participate as members of the evaluation team during the accreditation visit.

During the restructuring process other departments in central office, including those providing services for bilingual education, special education, career and technology education, and compensatory education, remained intact; however, each of these divisions was downsized considerably (INT 13:4:76-79; INT 10:11:249-254). Directors described reduction in personnel ranging from 35 professional employees down to 2 employees in one department, and in another from 7 professional employees down to 1 (INT 14:2:34-36; INT 10:10:223-225). A principal noted that members of the above-mentioned departments moved in and out of the Assessment and Support Teams to provide extra support and assistance to district campuses (INT 8:4:102-103).

Strategy 2. Changing roles, responsibilities, and relationships.

Probably more dramatic than the structural changes in central office was the superintendent's strategy to change the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of its membership. When the superintendent devolved authority to the campuses, the roles, responsibilities, and subsequent relationships of the central office staff members to campus staff were radically altered from that of supervision and compliance monitoring to an orientation of service and support for district campuses.

All interviews revealed ample evidence of a concentrated effort on the part of all central office personnel, including those in human resources and the business office, to provide direct services and support to campus principals. For example, one central office administrator indicated, "Most of my work is done with principals. My job is to make their life easier. If I can run interference for them in the district to make things happen, I will do so" (INT 13:6:130-132).

Another central office administrator said,

> Coming into the department from the outside, I was not reverent to the past. I came with the attitude that I wanted to create a department that assists principals in achieving what they want to achieve and not get in trouble for it (INT 14:2:32-34).

In order to support the principals, the central office director also said, "We

give them research, data, processes, best practices, and then we say, 'You make the decisions'" (INT 14:3:67-69).

The mission of the district Assessment and Support Teams, as verified by the superintendent and a central office administrator, was to evaluate the performance of district campuses, beginning with those which were low-performing; to make recommendations for improvement; and to provide the services, training, extra resources, planning, and technical support to help them improve (INT 13:4:87-99; INT 7:1:4-7). The central office administrator described with clarity the purpose of the teams: "It was important for us to be visible on the campuses. Our success was tied to campus success based on student performance. That's the reason we existed" (INT 13:3:52-54).

An Executive Team Leader of the Assessment and Support Teams described a process used to assess the performance of low-performing campuses:

> A strategy we used was to develop probes for a campus and do mini-visits, or *sweeps.* I would get people from other departments — finance, human resources, etc. — to go with us, and we would interview staff and give them feedback and technical assistance to address their needs (INT 13:6:123-128).

Strategy 3: Establishing systems of communication.

The third strategy used to restructure the district organization was establishing systems of communications. The district of Mariposa was an urban

school district serving more than 47,000 students on 60 campuses with about 6000 employees. Effective communication in such a large school district represented a unique challenge for the leader. The superintendent established his own strategies for communicating with his staff members based on a preference for face-to-face versus written communication: "I very seldom communicate in writing. I try to communicate verbally as much as possible" (INT 5:3:32).

The primary means used by the superintendent to disseminate his vision and message to all staff members in the district was through direct communication with the campus principals during monthly meetings. He described his communication strategy in the following statement:

> Communication is important in a large organization because you are dealing with people from large groups in a very remote way. I think as a leader you must have a message and that your ability to communicate that message is vital. You have to communicate it constantly and in a variety of ways, always ending up with the same thing. So your ability to motivate people through speech is vitally important in leadership -- you have to capture their imagination. In a large organization you can't do that everyday so you have to communicate the same message in such a way that you constantly get people motivated and you do it through other people. I do it through my principals. We meet with the principals once a month, and they get a 45-minute talk from me depending on what the issue

is. But I always bring the discussion right back to the central theme which is student success (INT 8:2:34-50).

Another important communication strategy utilized in the district was a structure of regular meetings among principals and district administrators. Principals and central office administrators described a schedule of three or four monthly meetings designed to build close relationships and vertical planning among feeder pattern schools within each of the four areas of the district (INT 3:6:240-250; INT 1:6:228-343). The Executive Director of an Assessment and Support team described the meeting structure below:

> We have formal monthly meetings of principals and central office administrators, but I think the strength lies in the monthly vertical meetings of principals within each of the four feeder pattern areas of the district. They meet with the executive director of their feeder pattern, and they also meet informally in horizontal meetings with other principals at their level of instruction (elementary, middle, and high school). There is a common instructional focus in the feeder patterns. The principals plan together and they combine funds, in some cases, for training purposes (INT 20:9:192-200).

Act V. Decentralizing Authority to District Campuses

While the decentralization of the district was undeniably a state mandate, it was evident from all interviews that the superintendent's interpretation and

leadership of the policies of decentralization and site-based management was considered to be unique by district staff members. During the district restructuring process, the superintendent employed several strategies to decentralize authority and empower the district campuses. The strategies identified in the data included: 1) implementation of site-based management; 2) empowerment of campus principals; 3) empowerment of classroom teachers; and 4) building capacity of campus personnel.

Strategy 1: Implementing SBM

The first strategy used to empower district campuses was to implement SBM throughout the district. Prior to the passage of Senate Bill One and the implementation of SBM teams, recalled a central office administrator, central office exerted extensive control over district campuses, while the principal controlled decision-making at the campus level (INT 22:8:193-195; INT 19:18:404-407). As the superintendent empowered campus administrators, the role of central office shifted from supervision and compliance monitoring to one of service and support for district principals and campuses (INT 14:1:9-10). The principals, in turn, empowered teachers, especially those who served on the campus site-based committees (CEICs), to participate in decisions related to budget, staff development, personnel, and instruction (INT 22:8:187-192).

Evidence from interviews with principals, teachers, and central office administrators clearly indicated that the superintendent exercised a pure and

robust interpretation of Senate Bill 1 and the state-mandated policy of SBM. The degree to which he empowered district campuses was described as significant by staff members, particularly in light of the superintendent's leadership style.

The superintendent was acknowledged widely as a powerful leader whose authority was unquestioned in the district. One of the district principals succinctly summarized the sentiments of the entire staff by stating, "He has very strong beliefs, and there's no doubt he's in charge" (INT 19B:12:483-484). Despite the strength of his personality and his willingness to wield power to achieve organizational goals, the superintendent was also willing to freely empower the people he employed to participate in the decision-making process. A principal illustrates this point as he describes the superintendent's transition to SBM and the empowerment of district campuses:

> He said, 'I like being a dictator, but the state says we have to have site-based decision-making, and so we're going to start doing it.' And I think although he was a little reluctant actually to start moving the budget and control out into the schools, when he saw people be successful, it made him more and more positive that this was a good thing. Hire good people, give them the resources they need to get the job done, and let them go after it (INT 19:18:407-414).

During the course of the restructuring process, the superintendent devolved authority over budgets, personnel, and programs, previously held and

tightly controlled by central office administrators, to the principals and the campus site-based management teams (INT 10:3:65-66). Prior to the superintendent's entry into the district in 1992, "Every campus had a budget, but the allocations for personnel, salaries, and training were determined at the central office, and the principals had no input into those decisions" (INT 4:8:189-194).

A central office administrator explained the superintendent's rationale for decentralizing decision-making to the campuses:

> I've heard the superintendent say many times, 'We commit to campus principals our most important resource — our children. And we tell them to make the day-to-day decisions, and yet we can't trust them with the resources and the money' (INT 13:16:346-348).

Interviews with teachers, principals, and central office personnel verified that, in Mariposa, the new superintendent interpreted the law to mean put the money in the hands of the principals and their site-based committees and empower them with total control over their budgets (INT 12:5:102-103; INT 8:6:131-133). A third principal recalled the transition to site-based budgeting:

> Prior to the entry of the new superintendent, the business manager developed a plan and funding formulas to turn the money over to the campuses. The superintendent made a passing comment, 'Put this money out on the campuses,' so since she had a plan in place, she did it. He came

back later and laughingly said, 'My gosh, I didn't mean all of it' (INT 1:4:173-18; INT 16:29:859-872).

The superintendent's strategy included the notion that campuses were responsible for virtually all their expenses. As one principal explained, "It wasn't a symbolic budget. All of a sudden, we were responsible for paying utilities, salaries, subs, staff development, instructional materials and cleaning supplies, everything" (INT 21:2:45-47).

Decentralized authority over professional development provided principals and their site-based committees the freedom to design professional development opportunities for their teachers. The superintendent's believed that if principals were to be held accountable for the performance of their students, they should have the freedom to meet the training needs of the staff and students (INT 19:7:147-163). The superintendent also gave principals the freedom to design their own staffing configurations and to frame their personnel budgets according to the needs of their campuses. (INT 20:7:156-159; DOC 24:2:47-51).

Adjusting to the sudden responsibility for their entire budgets created a new set of challenges for principals and site-based committees. Principals noted in interviews that along with the empowerment to design their budgets came "a lot of accountability, responsibility, and lots of headaches" (INT 4:8:30-31; INT 9:16:472-475). To enable principals and their staffs to be knowledgeable managers of their budgets, the business office and the director of finance offered

extensive budget training sessions at the district level and worked one-on-one with campus principals to support their fiscal success (DOC 24:2:41-44).

Following the implementation of SBM, the district provided principals and their staffs the opportunity to enjoy wide latitude in managing their budgets. However, central office did employ strategies to influence spending decisions on the campuses. An executive in central office explained the strategy:

> We have techniques to encourage areas of capacity-building that we want schools to pursue. We believe that every school should be investing as much money as they can in technology. What we say to the schools is, 'For every dollar you invest at the campus level, we are going to match it with a dollar from the central office' (INT 16:29:879-886).

The superintendent strongly supported the autonomy and empowerment of the professional staff (INT 19B:12:488). Operating from the premise that his staff members were "intelligent, college-educated people who have the ability to generate solutions to their own problems," his strategy was to prescribe the general direction and expected outcomes, free up the process, and encourage them to figure out for themselves how to get there (INT 1:7:388). "These people are capable," he said. "It doesn't make sense to hire these college educated people and stand there watching over them" (INT 7:14:368-372).

The superintendent's philosophy translated into a wide latitude of freedom

for principals and teachers to generate unique and diverse programmatic solutions to meet the needs of their schools based on the premise that the best people to make decisions are the ones working directly with the students (INT 14:4:69-72). One principal stated, "He gave us almost 100% authority at the site because each school is different, just like every family is different" (INT 17:1:14-16).

Within this environment of freedom, there was no standardization of curriculum or training from school to school, and there was tremendous diversity in programs and practices across the district. A district special programs director described the new perspective among the central office staff:

> We are concerned with revolutionizing practice and provoking practitioners. We are very keen on the idea that it is about change, and we like to invite people to use better practice. For this reason, we do not do any training within the school unless the principal requests it because I know what it's like to try to train teachers who are mandated to be anywhere. So when we go to a school it's because we've been invited. I also want to say we're very good and so we get invited a lot, and we're overwhelmed with requests (INT 14:4:75-79).

The changing role of central office to one of service and support allowed campus personnel to have a greater voice in how they choose to pursue district goals. Freedom from monitoring and supervision by central office staff provided district personnel the opportunity to have much greater choice, responsibility, and

accountability. The safety net for campuses was the service and support they knew were available at their request, or the support that would be initiated by central office if a campus fell short of district expectations.

Strategy 2: Empowering campus principals

A strategy used by the superintendent to empower district campuses was to elevate the power and decision-making authority of the campus principal. Considering the multiple responsibilities and demands of a campus principal in a decentralized environment, the superintendent sought "strong principals with a balance of instructional leadership, administrative, and managerial skills" and then empowered them to lead the schools (INT 8:2:33-41).

In the restructured organization, according to a central office leader, the principal became "the broker for leveraging services from the rest of the organization to help them improve student performance" (INT 16:4:13-14). From this new perspective, the main focus of the entire district was redirected toward meeting the needs of the campus principals. The term introduced by the superintendent to describe the role of the principal in the restructured organization was the "Consumer Principal" (INT 14:1:21-22). A respondent elaborated on the concept of the Consumer Principal:

> Everything that central office does should be in the best interests of those campuses. If a principal needs something at the campus, it is up to central

> office to treat them as a consumer and to make sure that they have it right away" (INT 8:5:115-128).

To build capacity and promote the effectiveness of campus principals in the restructured organization, the district facilitated pervasive and ongoing leadership training for administrators, both from within and without the district. The superintendent was a "key player" in the development and implementation of a community-wide Leadership Collaborative, a partnership among the local university, community colleges, business and civic organizations, and three local urban school districts, to provide high quality leadership training to principals (INT 2:1:15; INT 12:9:180-190). One principal described how she applied the training and experiences gained in the Leadership Collaborative to her campus:

> We had monthly readings to do, and I was able to come back to school and replicate a lot of what I was learning and then again always modeling to the teachers that I was a learner. So we were in that process of learning what we were going to become, and then sharing that learning with teachers (INT 12:8:190-196).

A culture of ongoing professional development within the district also supported principals in their acquisition of knowledge and leadership skills. Day-long meetings were held with principals once a month with the main portion of the day devoted to professional development. Training focused on topics such as enhanced DuPont Leadership training, analysis of assessment data, cooperative

learning, team building, presentations by high performing school districts such as Brazosport ISD, and budget development (INT 16B:5:271-283).

Strategy 3: Empowering classroom teachers

An outgrowth of the superintendent's strategy to decentralize decision-making to the campuses was an emphasis on diffusing leadership throughout the organization by empowering, developing, and elevating the status of the classroom teacher. The superintendent frequently expressed a belief in the empowerment of people to define the process of change and restructuring. Interviews revealed evidence of a new "culture of professional development" as central office administrators, principals, and teachers used terminology to describe "teachers as intellectuals" or "teachers as professionals" (INT 14:4:69-72; INT 4:17:415-419; INT 16:10:302-303). Principals described ways in which they encouraged and promoted the empowerment of classroom teachers through expanded opportunities for decision-making. "If we are hiring a new history teacher, I select a committee of teachers to screen and interview candidates. Then they have the responsibility to maintain a quality faculty" (INT 4:13:320-324). "I think that teachers are intelligent people and that they need to be included in decision-making processes. They need to be kept aware of school board issues and to know about the company they work for" (INT 4:17:415-420).

During an interview with a focus group of middle school teachers, one teacher articulated a belief that teacher empowerment was a district phenomenon in Mariposa ISD:

> Well, I think that as building administrators came to realize the value of doing that, it was kind of district-wide. They tell us, "You are the professionals. You went to school to learn and you really know a lot. We need to use your knowledge and the research that's out there" (INT 22:2:46-72).

Strategy 4: Building capacity of campus personnel.

A fourth strategy used by the superintendent to empower district campuses was to build the capacity of campus personnel. In order to build leadership capacity and to promote the performance of the campuses, the superintendent and central office staff facilitated several district leadership initiatives. The Assessment and Support Teams were soon recognized for their potential as a central office "training academy" for cultivating people in entry-level mid-management positions to become campus principals. According to a central office executive who developed this concept, "We are steeping them in the central support process, and they are going to be better prepared to go out and be a leader on the campus because they will know how to access the central support structure" (INT 16:2:41-44; INT 18:3:66-72; 91-105).

A second leadership initiative to build capacity strongly promoted and

nurtured by the Superintendent was the Urban Systemic Initiative (USI), a collaborative funded by a $3 million federal grant from the National Science Foundation (INT 3:1:14-15). The purpose of the five-year project was to fund training and mid-management certification for ten to fifteen master teachers who were selected as mentors to train and support other math and science teachers in the district. After completing their certification, the USI mentors were targeted for campus/district leadership positions as an assistant principal, principal, or as a member of one of the Assessment and Support teams (INT 16:2:88-104).

A third capacity-building initiative, Project Mariposa, was a $4 million federally-funded project which was designed to build organizational capacity for bilingual education in the district. According to the Director of Bilingual Education who wrote the five-year grant proposal, "I wanted [to develop] administrators who were knowledgeable about bilingual education. A major component of the grant was to train bilingual teachers to be district or campus administrators" (INT 14:2:43-44). Over a five-year period, approximately 50 people with administrative degrees and backgrounds in bilingual education became eligible for leadership positions in the district (INT 14:3:45-51).

The central office also provided an additional staff development component to support the effectiveness of the site-based management teams through required training for members of the teams. An executive team leader of a district Assessment and Support Team described the training program:

To support site-based management at the campus level, leadership training was provided to the CEIC teams to help them build the following skills: analysis of their own data, consensus building, teambuilding, developing agendas, all those things we take for granted with groups. Another part was training with assistant principals. The new assistant principal realized he or she has to be aware instructionally, be able to articulate what is happening instructionally at their schools, including Title I support, etc. This gave a whole other pool of leaders to the schools (INT 20:7:147-

Act VI: Creating Systems of Accountability.

When the accountability system came in, his theory was if somebody's keeping score, we're playing to win.

Central office administrator

A new policy environment in Texas based on student achievement and accountability for student performance created external pressures from the state as well as urgency from within the district to upgrade the level of academic performance. In 1993, Mariposa ISD received an "accredited" AEIS rating, but seven campuses were identified as "low performing," 42 campuses were rated as "acceptable," and none were rated as "recognized" or "exemplary." In addition to poor achievement scores, there was a high rate of retention and a high number of student dropouts in the district.

The superintendent expressed open admiration for the state accountability system as a powerful lever for improving student performance and providing equity and excellence for all students in Texas schools. In describing the system, he said:

> There are two critical components to the Texas system: one, it is achievement-based and second, disaggregating and reporting the performance of the subgroups is absolutely the key, because otherwise the achievement of those youngsters can be masked by the overall achievement of the larger group. And, the third thing is that there is accountability and consequences — not just taking a test, but publishing the results of it (INT 7:7:161-166).

The data demonstrated that the superintendent provided leadership acts to create balancing forces of state- and district-mandated accountability using the following strategies as levers to improve district performance: 1) establishing standards of performance for employees; 2) monitoring performance; 3) enforcing consequences; 4) linking reform policies of accountability and SBM; and 5) creating norms of continuous improvement.

Strategy 1: Establishing standards of performance.

The first strategy used to create systems of accountability was to establish standards of performance expectations within the district. The superintendent recognized that in order to produce high achievement across the district, the entire

staff, from the superintendent to the bus driver, must be held accountable for results. He communicated the following to his employees:

> What I have been saying is, it doesn't matter whether I like you. You are a wonderful principal, but if your school has never been recognized, you are not going to get a three-year contract. It has reinforced the notion that we are not going back to assessing people based on opinion. It is going to be based on results (INT 6:10:369-373).

He communicated the expectation that every employee define his or her job in terms of improving student achievement. The primary tool for assessing the performance of the district staff was student performance on TAAS and the AEIS accountability ratings. A principal recalled, "I think the end result was how well you did on your scores. He flat out told us in 1993 that we were responsible" (INT 17:3:54-56).

The superintendent believed in order to enforce accountability, the leader must ensure that employees understood there was a seriousness of purpose in the district and knew there would be consequences if they did not achieve the desired results (INT 6:2:26-30). To leverage accountability in Mariposa ISD, the superintendent created a system of internal accountability mechanisms that linked with the state accountability system based on TAAS and AEIS ratings.

An important mechanism established by the superintendent to create performance accountability in the district of Mariposa was to tie contract renewal

to student performance ratings. The superintendent, according to one principal, established his personal accountability for student performance when negotiating his initial contract for employment with the board by requesting a one-year, not a three-year, employment contract (INT 19B:13:512; INT 6:8:269-273).

The superintendent extended a similar mandate to campus principals at his first staff meeting after he was hired. At that meeting, as verified by principals, the superintendent announced his decision to break district precedent and offer administrators one-year rather than multi-year contracts (INT 19:16:351-352; INT 1:3:107-109). His rationale, he explained, was based on the disparity between the administrator performance evaluations and the student test scores:

> I tried to find some logic and a way they could understand what I had to do so at least some of them could be supportive of it. It was not a friendly conversation. I said to them, 'I want to give you my first impressions of this district. I have come to the conclusion that this district has the dumbest kids in the country — and the brightest adults. How do I know that? I looked at the test scores. These are abominable test scores. I looked at the personnel folders in the personnel office, and everybody's evaluation here 'exceeds expectations'. If you can explain to me how these bright adults can exist with these dumb kids, you let me know. For that reason, nobody will get a multi-year contract until I find out if all of

you are really that brilliant and these kids are really that dumb' (INT 6:9:329-342).

With this startling announcement, the superintendent made his point that campus principals were accountable for student performance. He said, "They knew right away. You might say the glove was in their face" (INT 6:9:342-343). He sent a clear message to principals during that meeting that performance evaluations would no longer be based on subjective opinions but would be based entirely on student performance results (INT 2:3:108).

The superintendent also demonstrated his commitment to accountability by diffusing accountability throughout the system, linking the performance of central office staff members to student achievement. He clarified his strategy in the following statement:

> In most accountability systems only one person is accountable, but in our system everyone is accountable for the performance results of students. Our end-of-course scores are horrible in the core subjects at the high school. Now we are going to be able to hold the district accountable because the central office Assessment and Support Teams' accountability is tied back to the success of students. That has built a strong sense of cohesion in the system (INT 7:8:211-216).

Strategy 2: Monitoring performance:

The superintendent used clear strategies such as principal oversight to personalize and monitor performance. Through the evaluation process, the superintendent applied both pressure and support to hold principals accountable for campus performance. The principal evaluation was described as an end-of-the-year "conversation" in which various aspects of the campus annual performance were discussed. One principal described the typical conversation to include the following elements:

> The first question he asks is 'How are your scores?' And, 'What are you doing? What are you not doing?' He always asks, 'How many staff members do you have that are not performing, and what are you doing about it?' (INT: 431-435).

The superintendent provided the following perspective about the evaluation process,

> I try to establish an environment in which every individual is responsible to me and then I try to get them to establish the same environment in their schools, knowing that they are being evaluated everyday, every time we talk, so there are no surprises at the end of the year. The evaluation is really a conversation in which we talk about their school and what we can do to help them. It is not an adversarial thing. So they get the impression

> that I am just as accountable for their success as holding them accountable for the performance of their staffs (INT 7:9:222-233).

In addition to performance-based evaluations and administrative transfers, another strategy devised by the superintendent to leverage accountability was the monitoring and intervention of low-performing campuses by the district Assessment and Support teams. The teams applied a combination of pressure and support for change. Evidence from interviews with principal, teachers, and central office staff indicated that district campuses were "leveled" based on their performance on TAAS and their AEIS accountability ratings (INT 13:2:30-37). Campuses identified as "low-performing" in relation to district performance goals were targeted for an intense process of assessment and intervention. In contrast, campuses performing at "recognized" and "exemplary" levels were rewarded by being left alone (INT 1:3:99-102; INT 7:1:10-13). One principal explained:

> The Assessment and Support Teams monitored the campuses that were low-performing, just like you monitor teachers not doing well. My campus was "exemplary" for two years. They never came on my campus unless invited, but they were over at the "low-performing" campuses all the time. For those campuses, monitoring was not negotiable. The teams were not looked at as punishment teams, but when you have outside administrators on your campus all the time you feel it. You had to turn in a report on the status of what you're doing every month. I had a friend

> who took over a "low-performing" campus who called me to complain about them being at his campus. I told him, 'Darlin', get your scores up, and they'll go away' (INT 1:3:88-95).

The first area of focus and intervention for the Assessment and Support teams were the seven low-performing campuses during the 1992-93 school year. Within a year there were no low-performing campuses. Within two years the district was clearly out of the low-performing range, and there were seven recognized schools. Over a six-year period, the focus of the teams changed from "low performing" to assisting schools achieve "recognized" and then "exemplary" status (INT 13:4:87-88; INT 8:8:184-187; INT 21:2:51-58; INT 19:3:62-66). An additional area of focus was to "raise the number of students who are receiving academic recognition" (INT 8:8:187-188).

A focus for the district, according to the superintendent and central office administrators, was to increase the ratings at the high schools to "recognized" status and meet district performance standards. At the time of the study, all high school campuses were rated "acceptable" on the AEIS rating system and were being targeted for intervention by the teams. A central office administrator described the shared decision-making process used by the Assessment and Support teams to assist low-performing campuses in reaching achievement goals:

> They know this year they are on the bubble. If they don't give us the "recognized" high schools that we expect this year then they are moving

> out of site-based management into shared decision making next year. In other words, we will give you first shot at doing it your way by availing yourself of the resources and support. But if you don't get there — and we want you to get there — then you are going to do it our way. At that point, we give the principal exactly what we want him or her to focus on and emphasize. We give the site-based management team the issues we want discussed on a monthly basis and how to create and monitor their campus improvement plan. So we give them the guidance along with other kinds of support. But they don't get to make any decisions unless we concur with them (INT 16:30:915-917; 938-949).

Strategy 3: Enforcing consequences.

A central office administrator reported that when the principal was not performing to standards, "The superintendent goes 'mano á mano' (one-on-one) with the principal" to discuss achievement data, communicate specific expectations for performance, and extract specific commitments for improvement, if needed (INT 14:9:218-223). In turn, principals communicated one-on-one with individual teachers about the scores of their students, often taking drastic measures to systematically upgrade the quality of their staff members. An elementary principal said: "All teachers in Mariposa ISD are held accountable. They have their kids at the start of the year; there's a score at the end of the year. How do you escape that?" (INT 19:35:793-796).

Campus principals clearly understood the superintendent's expectations for them to improve their campus rating to a "recognized" or "exemplary" level. They also understood the consequences for failure to achieve expected results. As an example, the superintendent recalled an evaluation with a principal whose school was not progressing:

> I had a conversation with a principal whose school was located in one of the higher economic areas of our community but had not yet achieved a rating of "recognized." For two years we talked about that. Finally, I asked her, 'What's going to happen next year if you don't make it?' She said, 'If I don't make it next year, we won't have this conversation. I'll resign.' I said, 'Fine.' So she knew that either she took that step or I would take that step. Luckily, she came through (INT 7:9:235-241).

Another campus principal of a highly innovative, exemplary elementary school recalled a similar "conversation" with the superintendent during her end-of-the-year performance evaluation:

> Four years ago when I came in for my evaluation and the superintendent asked me about my scores, I said 'I just have to be honest with you. I do school for one reason and that is to do what is right for children. I don't necessarily do school for TAAS. I need your support. I need time. I know what we're doing is going to work but it's going to take us a number of years so I need you to be patient with me. In three years, if it doesn't

> happen, you can send me to the warehouse to count textbooks. And he said, three years? I said, 'Yes.' And he said, 'Okay' (INT 12:19:431-445).

A concrete demonstration of the superintendent's commitment to accountability was the exercise of administrative transfers to move principals around in the district if he was dissatisfied with campus performance (INT 17:2:48). Teachers, principals, and central office administrators noted that if the superintendent determined the principal was not producing the desired results, he often reassigned them to a new campus or created new positions for them at central office (INT 19:17:368; INT 15:4:75). One central office administrator recalled, "That first year he moved sixteen principals" (INT 10:11:233). Although a popular interpretation of the superintendent's strategy among teachers, principals, and central office administrators was that he used reassignment as a lever to improve the effectiveness of principals whose campuses were not performing to expectations (INT 17:2:48-50; INT 22:11:281-284; INT 23:3:61-65), another view expressed by one central office administrator was that the superintendent was providing a safety net for principals to avoid dismissing them (INT 15:4:72-82). According to the account of one principal:

> He didn't have to interview for interim changes. He told people, 'I'm going to put you there and you there, and you're going to become a principal-in-residence.' You don't want to be a principal-in-residence

> because they take you away from your school and they put you over at central office and make up something for you to do. But he made ten people principals-in-residence, and sometimes they got a second chance, and sometimes they just kind of disappeared and went somewhere else (INT 19:16:365-372).

All interviews revealed that one of the most dramatic demonstrations of the superintendent's commitment to accountability was the action he took to reconstitute a low-performing high school. After warning the principal and school staff for four or five years that the school's performance must be improved, the superintendent called a meeting with the entire staff and announced that the school would be closed. All positions, including those of teacher, secretarial, and custodial staff, were vacated and refilled through an interview process. Most of the employees, according to a focus group of teachers, were not rehired for their positions. These teachers viewed the superintendent's actions as a strategy to put pressure on "weak principals to produce results" (INT 22:11:280-284). The superintendent described his rationale for taking action to reconstitute a low-performing school:

> In education we say so many things and there is never any consequence, never any action taken. I believe that as the leader, you have to demonstrate you are very serious and purposeful about what you are attempting to do. If the staff doesn't believe you, they won't follow you.

> I use the example of what happened at Bellview High School. For four or five years we talked and cajoled, and then we said, 'Fine, that's it. Bomp.' So we said bye-bye and then no more discussion (INT 6:2:27-33).

In short order, principals came to understand the superintendent's expectations for accountability. One principal summarized succinctly the sentiment expressed by all principals interviewed for this study: "You know that if you are not successful, you're not going to be there a long time. And they were very fair. They said you have three years to bring up performance. Three years is a long time" (INT 19B:6:245-253).

Strategy 4: Linking accountability and SBM

In Mariposa ISD, it was well understood that a high rate of district accountability for outcomes was juxtaposed and balanced by a high degree of freedom to determine the process at the school site. As one central office administrator explained, if school personnel are expected to take ownership for their work and to be held accountable for achieving high academic performance, they must have the freedom to control the factors of success and the resources to effectively implement the system. Within an environment of freedom and trust, a feeling of ownership and accountability for the work will develop (INT 16:7:209-216).

Over and over again during interviews with the superintendent, central office administrators, principals, and teachers, the terms *accountability* and *site-*

based management were linked together by participants to describe a set of paired, interrelated concepts. District staff members, including teachers, often characterized the interdependent relationship between accountability and site-based management as a marriage in the way they were defined and implemented (INT 16:7:187-192; INT 15:7:148-149; INT 25:1:12-15; INT 19:30:670-672). In one interview, the superintendent articulated his unique interpretation of accountability and SBM:

> If I were to tell you the one single most important reason I was impressed [by the state reform policy], it was the marriage of SBM and the accountability system. But nobody, not even Skip Meno, was able to understand the relationship between the two. And the way I put it is this — if you have an accountability system without SBM, without giving people the wherewithal to get to where they're supposed to get, that's a cruel system, and it's going to be subverted. Because if people don't have any authority but they're being held accountable, they will subvert the system eventually, and it will fail. On the other hand, if you have SBM without accountability, that's chaos. And so, we're the one district that's been able to put the two together and understand their relationship (INT 7:7:169-181).

Strategy 5: Creating norms of continuous improvement.

A fifth strategy employed by the superintendent to implement systems of

accountability was to create norms of continuous improvement. The opportunity for principals and teachers to make important decisions about the critical factors of success — personnel, budget, and staff development — coupled with clear accountability for student performance, have created a powerful dynamic in Mariposa ISD that spurred innovation and led the district to norms of continuous improvement in student performance (INT 15:3:65-71).

The data clearly confirms that the superintendent set high goals for student performance and a lofty vision of student success which included exemplary performance levels at all campuses and the expectation that all students would be prepared for college upon graduation from high school. He provided ongoing attention to the vision by continuously re-emphasizing the achievement goals and by providing support for innovation through resource allocation and empowerment of the staff (INT 16:25:760-763). His focus on performance, provision of high levels of support, and insistence on accountability were strategies used to ensure continuous movement toward the achievement of the shared vision (INT 14:3:52-55). The superintendent described the persistent process used to meet the stated goals:

> I think the goal has always been constant – that all our schools would be exemplary. We've constantly had to adjust. When I arrived there were seven low-performing schools. We had to move our assessment teams into those areas. Now we are concentrating on the high schools. So the

strategies changed from time to time, but the goal has remained the same. There has been one additional goal. We got involved with the College Boards, and we are the only district in the country that has a contract with them to prepare all students grades 7-12 to take the pre-SAT and SAT tests at no charge.

A central office administrator described the superintendent's emphasis on continuous improvement of achievement beyond minimum passing standards toward the exemplary performance goals established by the superintendent:

> We're always focused on the bottom line — if you didn't get there, why not? Our focus schools, those that are now called low-performing, would be high-achieving in other places. But that's not enough because the superintendent said we have to shoot for "100 by 100.' And although our research person says there's no 100 TLI, that's got to be the goal — every kid has to receive maximum because 70% passing is not enough. And so, he set those goals and we keep setting them higher and higher (INT 15:3:65-68).

Research Question Two

What was the perceived effectiveness of the superintendent's strategies and leadership acts?

Act I: Establishing an Agenda for Change

The data revealed the superintendent's first leadership act after his entry into the district was to establish an agenda for change based on strategies used to: 1) assess the district needs and 2) to identify the pressures and needs for change.

Although interview respondents verified that the superintendent, not a group of district leaders, assessed the conditions and pressures for change and formulated the components of a restructuring plan, they did not evaluate the effectiveness of the leadership acts and strategies used to establish an agenda for change. The superintendent described assessment behaviors that included examination of district and state policies and procedures, observations of district operations and processes, talking to and listening to staff and community members. The interpretive and evaluative processes associated with these activities were internal to the superintendent and unobservable to others. (Leithwood, 1995; Musella, 1995). Since the processes that occurred during assessment were largely processes of analysis and decision-making that occurred internally within the superintendent, respondents were not in a position to determine the effectiveness of the superintendent's assessment and decision-making processes, but could assess other observable leadership acts and strategies

which were subsequently used by the superintendent to implement his plan for improving the district.

Act II: Transforming District Culture.

Data from all interviews confirmed the overwhelming perception that the superintendent's leadership acts and strategies used to challenge the belief system of the employees and to transform the prevailing culture of deprivation and low expectations were perceived to be among the most effective and significant strategies that he employed (INT 23:9:220-223). To initiate the transformation of district culture, the superintendent used creative financing, new facilities, and innovative programs — visible symbols of success — to alter the deficit model of thinking and rebuild pride in the community.

The superintendent used the following strategies to transform the district culture: 1) insisting on shared beliefs 2) financing an ambitious building program; and 3) promoting creativity and innovation. Perceptions of the effectiveness of the leadership acts and strategies are presented below:

Strategy 1: Insisting on shared beliefs.

The superintendent was prescriptive and inflexible in his insistence that all employees share common beliefs that poor children could learn and achieve at the highest performance levels. Because the new beliefs were "hard on people," approximately 60% of the employees left the district (INT 15:2:26-43).

According to the interview respondents, those who remained in the district chose to accept the new belief system and new employees were "acculturated into the new belief system" (INT 20:6:128). The most compelling evidence that the superintendent was effective in transforming beliefs was the overwhelming data from all interview respondents that a system of shared beliefs became widely accepted by all existing employees.

During interviews, several principals provided evidence that they had supported the superintendent's mandate for change and worked to support his efforts to build shared belief systems on their campuses. A sample of the evidence is provided below: One principal explained,

> There was a core of people in the district who believed the same way the superintendent did, and he's been able to put together a team that has the same expectations that he does. And principals put together teams at their schools that have the same expectations that he does (INT 19B:12:474-480).

To further illustrate this point, an elementary campus principal stated,

> I knew I had a lot of work to do. I knew that there was nothing wrong with the children. I knew the kids were going to be just fine and the parents as well. But the challenge was to change the mind set of the larger percentage of those [staff members] who had been there a very long time (INT 12:5:112-115).

One principal, appointed by the new superintendent to a low-performing elementary school and charged with the responsibility of improving student performance, interviewed and re-staffed his entire school. Teachers from his school confirmed that sixty-five percent of the staff was replaced during the re-staffing process (INT 25:3:1-2). The principal described the important role played by the leader in establishing a shared belief system among members of the school organization:

> It's the leader who establishes the expectations of the school. I remember talking to our faculty at first, and we were low-performing. We had 37% of our kids passing math and 50% passing reading. And I said, 'We will become one of the best schools in the state of Texas.' And all the snickers and stuff [from the staff] — 'There's no way that can happen' — and you know right away. I interviewed all those people and the ones that thought there were legitimate reasons why our kids were not going to be successful, I knew I had to let them go — if they're saying they [the kids] are never going to do well because they live on this side of the freeway, because their parents don't care, they don't have enough money, they don't get to travel, all these excuses. I was very nice. I listened to all those people and, in my mind, I knew — 'Gone, gone, you're going to stay, love you because you have a wonderful philosophy.' And I think he [the superintendent] probably did the same thing with us. You have to put

people in there who believe that kids can do it. I cannot make you believe something if you don't want to believe it (INT 19:17:376-390).

The prescriptive strategy used by the superintendent to change employee beliefs substantially altered the complexion of the work force in the district. Because the beliefs were "hard on people," many employees who were unable to make the required paradigm shift left the school district; those who remained have chosen to perform according to the new beliefs (INT 20:6:128). According to one central office administrator, "It wasn't so much of a transformation of those who were here as a swapping of people. So, the people that came in were kind of acculturated to the new norms — the 'no excuses' norm. And then the half to one-third of the people who stayed bought in and said, 'okay'!"(INT 15:2:45-48).

Evidence throughout all interviews demonstrated that staff members who survived the restructuring process and remained as employees in the district became believers in the children's ability to succeed. They realized that high achievement goals were non-negotiable with the superintendent, and they recognized he had the power to ensure his goals were achieved.

Strategy 2: Financing a building program

To challenge the mental models of members of the school community and demonstrate the district was not poor, the superintendent used creative financing to fund a district-wide building program, a project designed to nurture a culture of abundance and success and restore self-esteem in the school community.

Tangible evidence of the success of the superintendent's creative financial plan were the several millions of dollars generated by the superintendent to finance the construction project and technology as well as the new and remodeled facilities across the district. Staff members also provided evidence of the positive impact of the new construction on the pride and self-esteem of members of the school district.

One central office administrator explained that when the superintendent initiated the building program, "People began saying, 'Oh, he's building monuments to himself,' but, after a while, they started seeing what a difference these beautiful buildings made to kids, teachers and parents" (INT 14:9:204-207). A campus principal remarked, "You can go visit any school and you'll see what I'm talking about. It has created a sense of community pride" (INT 17:9:224-230). Another central office administrator said, "There's no doubt there has been a lot of attention to facilities. I think it has helped create that success mentality" (INT 24:12:492-496).

The superintendent also recalled with satisfaction the transforming effects of the building program on the district culture. As students, staff, and parents began to see the results of the new construction,

> All of a sudden this thing began to change, and it became symbolic of everything else that was going to change. We had money; we would do construction; we were not poor; our children are not deprived. They can

learn. So now we have a culture of plenty — plenty of ideas and plenty of success (INT 6:2:10-15).

Through continuous effort over time, the superintendent transformed the district from "a culture of deprivation to a culture of abundance and success," supporting a shared belief system throughout the organization about the rich learning potential of poor, Hispanic children (INT 14:3:47-50).

Strategy 3: Promoting creativity and innovation.

The evidence from interviews with teachers, principals, and central office personnel demonstrated that the superintendent's strategy to promote creative thinking and stimulate innovation at all levels of the organization as a means to transform culture was considered to be vastly successful by district staff members. The superintendent promoted creativity and innovation by developing an open system that embraced and rewarded experimentation and by dedicating district resources to support unique programs and initiatives (INT 22:18:462-464). Within a risk-free environment, people were encouraged to try new things and to learn from their mistakes. A creative thinker himself, the superintendent continuously generated new ideas, "planted the seeds," and "let others develop all the details" (INT 16:23:698-700).

The strategy resulted in an explosion of creativity in the district, manifesting itself a host of unique and diverse initiatives designed to raise achievement, address inequities in schools, and improve the life chances of

students in the district. A few of the projects and programs included the following (DOC 26, p. 2):

- High quality professional development for administrators and teachers;
- A Student Entrepreneurial that gave students an opportunity to operate a "real world" business in a "market" environment which allowed students to manufacture, display, and sell their goods;
- The state's first tuition-free summer school program that served 20,000 students each summer and required parents to spend two hours a week at summer school with their child in order for them to attend;
- State-of-the-art technology initiatives, including fiber optic networks, laptop computers for each student, distance learning classes, and training for teachers to support the integration of technology into instruction;
- Magnet school programs, including a health professions magnet, a performing arts magnet, an international language school, and a Micro-Society school;
- A nationally recognized alternative school program that kept students in school, changed their attitudes about learning, and funded college scholarships for students who chose to attend;
- *Ready to be Ready,* a community outreach program developed to provide training for economically disadvantaged families to teach new parents how to accelerate the learning process of newborn to pre-school children;

- The Mini-grant program for teachers, initiated by the superintendent, was designed to stimulate innovative instruction in the district. The program was funded by a tax increase that provided $3 million in revenue to support the grants for teachers.

The superintendent also generated extra funding for the district by instituting an open enrollment policy as a means of attracting students from other districts to Mariposa ISD. According to the superintendent, the additional $5 million of revenue generated from open enrollment were used to finance salary increases for district employees (INT 6:3:60-64). Since schools in Mariposa received funding based on their average daily attendance (ADA), campus principals were also encouraged to be creative in developing strategies to increase their enrollment. One principal explained how the superintendent's innovative new policy promoted her plan to generate funding for her campus:

> A few years ago, my school's enrollment dropped because the community was changing and the school was getting older. The superintendent created an open enrollment policy where anybody can attend school wherever they want so we started a campaign at our school. We put up billboards and advertised to attract new students to our campus. As a result, we were up to six hundred twenty five kids last year, and I knew this year we would be over seven hundred. When you are looking at two thousand dollars a kid,

> give or take, in our budget allocations, a hundred extra kids is a lot of extra bucks (INT 4:14:353-386).

A principal of an exemplary elementary campus recounted how, during the first year of the district's mini-grant program, she and her staff seized the nascent opportunity presented by this successful initiative to implement sweeping changes in her then low-performing school:

> When the superintendent came to the district, he put out the carrot of three million dollars and set up the mini-grant program. That gave teachers a big incentive, either as an individual, as grade levels, or as a whole school to write grants. What he said was, 'Be as innovative as you can be.' During my first year as a principal, I developed this dream of starting an Accelerated School based on the concept of a Micro-Society. That first year of the mini-grant program (1992) there was no cap on the amount of money a school could get. We wrote the grant and got $195,000 to become a Micro-Society school. We visited the first Micro-Society school in Lowell, Massachusetts. We took some staff, parents, and students because we knew we had to involve everybody. We had a lot of community meetings, talking to the parents about what we were going to create. Everybody said, 'Yes, let's do it!' (INT 12:13:289-305).

As the superintendent encouraged and facilitated innovative thinking,

people flourished in an environment of freedom, trust, and support. Clearly, once people in the district were given the latitude to experiment with new ideas in a risk-free environment, the floodgates were opened and an explosion of creativity occurred (DOC 26:8:385-388). Another central office administrator verified the high level of divergent thinking occurring in the district:

> Probably a year after the superintendent got here, we began to do things differently. We had more waivers than any other district in the state. There were some waivers that I had to grit my teeth over, but we let them go because of the concept of ownership and original research done by the people at the campus. And some of them didn't pan out but they learned from their mistakes, and they spun it and made it work (INT 16:24:732-742).

From the perspective of the majority of the staff, creativity and experimentation will occur naturally in an organization when the environment is supportive. For example, a central office director made the following observation:

> I think the cornerstone of allowing creativity and innovation to happen is not causing it, but just getting out of the way. The cornerstone is moving from compliance and monitoring to accountability, from standards to standardization — just freeing up the process (INT 14:3:58-63).

Act III. Creating a Shared Vision.

Creating a vision that elevates the performance of all students across an entire district requires leadership that acts with moral authority to create urgency, a respect for diversity, and high expectations for all students (Fullan, 2001). A strategy used effectively by the superintendent as a lever to drive up test scores was the establishment of a vision of high expectations for student academic performance (INT 25:1:20-22). The data indicated the superintendent employed two strategies to create a shared vision: 1) setting high expectations; and 2) creating a focus on performance.

Strategy 1: Setting high expectations.

Evidence of the effectiveness of the superintendent's strategy to improve student performance by setting expectations was present in interview data, in the district's TAAS performance record, and on the AEIS accountability reports. All teachers stated that the district's high expectations for student achievement could be traced directly to the superintendent and his vision for student success. One teacher said, "He set high expectations for all children and there were no excuses for poor performance" (INT 25:1:20-22). Further, a group of teachers described the expectations in terms of a "trickle down effect" beginning with the superintendent and ending with students:

> I remember the superintendent going to meetings and elevating us. Some people would say, 'Yeah, he's just talking.' But actually that comes through. The principal brings it to us, and we pass it on to the students" (INT 22:4:88-91; INT 25:1:25).

All interviews demonstrated that the superintendent was perceived to be a leader who "challenged his staff," raised the bar, and stretched them to perform at unanticipated levels (DOC 25:15:711-712). Comments from principals, central administrators, and teachers included the following: **"**He's the first great superintendent I have worked for. He is very adept at challenging our thinking and our paradigms" (INT 16:9:442-445). "He serves as a tremendous mentor to those individuals who report to him. He puts you out there on the edge of what you think are the limits of your capacities to perform" (INT 16:10:287-292).

Staff members expressed their comfort with the superintendent's high performance expectations. As described by one exemplary principal, "I always know exactly where he is coming from — he never splits hairs. I like that, we all do, because you know what is expected, you know the consequences for not doing it, and you know the rewards (INT 1:3:128-132). One point of flexibility was always mentioned in conjunction with the superintendent's rigid performance expectations — employees exercised almost total freedom in determining how they would achieve those results. As one principal explained:

> The superintendent is the key to all this. He's a man who establishes a vision of what he wants. Basically what he did was establish very high expectations that were non-negotiable, and let you figure out how to get there. I have the highest regard for him because everyone's attitude and energy rose when he came into the district (INT 19B:12:465-473).

Strategy 2: Creating a focus on performance.

One of the important effects of the superintendent's shared vision for success was the development of an organizational focus. As one principal recalled, "After the arrival of the superintendent, you saw people really focused on the vision and ultimately on quality instruction of students" (INT 21:3:66-67). A central office administrator described the superintendent's commitment to results:

> We saw a real focus on student performance and, to that end, site-based management, downsizing of central office, and the shifting of power, decision-making, and resources to those people who are closest to the students. And that we shifted from a central office that monitored to a central office focused on student outcomes (INT 14:1:7-10).

Another respondent referred to the "focus" of central office efforts:

> In terms of leadership behavior exhibited by the central office, I think one of the key features is having a focus on student performance. You are funneling all your decisions through a filter that is tied back to

> performance. When all divisions are looking at issues through that set of lenses, then you have an organization that has true focus (INT 16:4:107-111).

Further evidence of the superintendent's commitment to high standards and to the spirit of the vision statement was the district's controversial policy which required all high school students to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), at the district's expense, and to submit at least one application to a college or university prior to graduation. The policy was a by-product of a district partnership with the National Merit Scholarship board in New York. The partnership was dedicated to the preparation of all Mariposa ISD students, beginning at the sixth grade level, to take the SAT test as a condition for high school graduation (DOC 26:4:159-162; INT 7:13:334-337).

By preparing students to pass the SAT test and by requiring them to apply to a college or university, an immediate goal was to increase the number of students from Mariposa who were attending college or a university on scholarships. A long-term goal of the initiative was to ensure that within approximately five years the district would produce the greatest number of national merit scholarship finalists in the country (DOC 26:4:151-154; INT 7:13:335-339). As one middle school teacher noted, "In this district, we used to segregate kids, but now everyone's on the college track" (INT 22:18:450).

The thinking that inspired the superintendent and district level leadership to promote high expectations through a district policy requiring all students to take the SAT was described by a key central office administrator:

> We have this belief in the unlimited potential of the children. We act accordingly now and we don't set predetermined limits on a kid's level of achievement. We are right now embroiled in this issue of whether all students should take the SAT. The question arises, through what set of lenses should you be examining that issue? According to my lens, when you took your children to school on the first day of kindergarten, what was your expectation, long-term? That your children were going to college, right? We have that expectation for all children. And we took the economics out of it. They should all take the SAT — like they should all take Algebra I and English (INT 16:6:164-183).

Act IV: Restructuring the District Organization.

After an early assessment of district operations in 1992, the superintendent determined the organizational structure to be an ineffective and inefficient system for improving the district's condition of low performance (INT 25:1:5-7). This assessment, along with the state mandate to decentralize, promoted the superintendent's decision to make structural changes in the organization in order to make the system more responsive to the needs of district campuses, and ultimately to the needs of students. All interviews with teachers, principals, and

central office staff members verified that the actions taken by the superintendent to restructure the district organization were perceived to be very effective. Three strategies were used to restructure the organization for greater efficiency and effectiveness: 1) reorganizing central office; 2) changing roles, responsibilities, and relationships of central office; and 3) creating systems of communication. Most important, the steps taken by the superintendent to restructure the role of central office staff to one of service and support, represented one of the most effective strategies leading to the academic success of the district.

Strategy 1: Reorganizing central office.

From the perspective of the campus principals, the superintendent's strategy to reorganize central office dramatically transformed the relationships between personnel at the campuses and administrators at the central office level. One principal said, "I have been in this district for a long time, and the biggest change I have seen is support from central office. Instead of telling us, 'You can't do this and that,' they say, 'If you think it will work, try it!' (INT 3:3:124-126). Another principal succinctly described central office support by saying, "They help you, but they don't interfere" (INT 19:33:751-752).

All interviews revealed the formation of the Assessment and Support Teams was considered to be a highly effective component of the superintendent's restructuring strategy. A principal described the valuable role of the teams in improving the performance of his campus through intervention and support:

> There were initially four teams, and they were great. That's what saved me down at my previous school. The team members became quasi-administrators and helped me manage the school until I could get going. They used to come on the average once every three to four weeks. They delivered workshops and were always helping. Now it is rare when I see a team member at my school. Which is okay, I guess, because by this time I know what to do. Sometimes I wish I had them to fall back on. The teams used to do a lot of training for us (INT 17:7:160-172).

A central office administrator evaluated the superintendent's decision to restructure central office and provide a better support mechanism for improving student achievement:

> The superintendent's idea was that to move campuses forward, there has to be a support structure out at the campus level — not people here in central office pushing paper. Now how he came up with the idea of Assessment and Support teams, I'm not privy to that. But as I've reflected on the process, I don't believe it could have been done any differently. Dissolving the two departments (elementary and secondary education) that theoretically provided major support to campuses made a very definite statement that those traditional structures were not going to work. Now, if your next question is going to be was everybody happy, absolutely not. The rules of the game changed very dramatically. So it was a tough time,

but an exciting time, because all the rules were out the window (INT 13:10:217-230).

Evidence of effectiveness of the strategy were the achievement gains reported by respondents that occurred at district campuses as a result of direct intervention by an Assessment and Support Team. Additionally, all interviews confirmed that as the academic performance of district campuses increased over time, the need for technical assistance and training to campuses diminished; subsequently, the number of Assessment and Support Teams were decreased from four teams to two (INT 7:8:192-195). Over a six-year period from 1992-1998, three reorganizations of central office occurred. During the restructuring process, central office members continued to refocus their efforts and self-correct their roles and behaviors along the way to address the changing needs of the district campuses in the quest for continuous improvement (INT 13:11:245-249; INT 15:9:196-200). In essence, the teams were working themselves out of a job with the increased success of the district campuses (INT 18:3:91; INT 13:3:63; INT 7:8:192-193).

Strategy 2: Changing roles, responsibilities, and relationships

Evidence from all interviews indicated that the superintendent supported school success by reorganizing central office to take on new roles as supporters and enablers of work taking place in the schools. In Mariposa, central office personnel offered technical support to campus principals in a variety of ways,

including instructional support, extra resources, planning, personnel recruitment and management, student performance data, technology support, and training.

An important tactic promoted by the superintendent and highly valued by campus principals and teachers was the strategic use of student assessment data to improve student performance. To support the district focus on accountability and student achievement, central office staff developed a benchmark assessment program and provided the district campuses a wealth of disaggregated data and training to assist them in diagnosing students' instructional needs. According to one principal,

> We are a data-driven district. We get wonderful support from our research and development division in the analysis of student performance data. They provide us TAAS profiles and benchmark assessment data on all our kids. We give a mock TAAS test and we get results back by teacher, by student, and by objective (INT 3:9:365-370).

Several principals referred to the assistance provided to them by the personnel department in recruiting and screening qualified teacher candidates. One principal described it in this way:

> We have a personnel director who is very helpful in locating quality people. They send us a list of very good candidates on contract with the district, and we interview from that list. Also, I am going to have 20

student teachers next semester, so when I call him and tell him this one is real good, he pretty much puts them on contract (INT 1:4:153-156).

Principals reported they received strong support from the superintendent and central office staff in backing their recommendations to terminate marginal or incompetent employees. Principals used the strategy as a lever to improve the quality of their staffs (INT 19:6:132-135; INT 12:9:202-209; INT 9:9:265-269). During an interview with the superintendent, he referred to ongoing discussions with principals about removing incompetence from their campuses: The superintendent told his principals, "If you have somebody [on your staff] who you definitely think is destructive to children's learning, get rid of them. You have my support" (INT 6:10:55-35). "He determined that if a teacher was not happy in a particular school, he or she should be able to shop around and find a school that suits his/her philosophy" (INT 12:10:211-216). This type of support was viewed as critical in a district where principals were held strictly accountable for the performance of their staff and students. The change in philosophy provided principals the leverage they needed to encourage a teacher to make a career move when the teacher was unable or unwilling to adjust to a change in direction of the campus.

A widely mentioned area of central office support for campus principals was in the area of budget. In contrast to the subjective approach to funding that existed prior to 1992, interviews revealed the perception that objective, equitable,

and supportive procedures were currently used to allocate district resources to all campuses (INT 1:4:156-159).

The superintendent demonstrated visible support to his staff through a commitment to provide ample resources for training, technology, and curricular initiatives so school personnel could achieve results. As a result, principals and teachers alike reported there was plenty of money to address the needs of their staff and students. The district's finance officer described the budget process and the supportive approach to meeting campus needs:

> We are funded from the state with a formula that takes into account the different types of students and their special needs. We use a similar approach to funding the campuses that is based on ADA but also includes complex formulas that address the fixed costs of small campuses and grade spans so that high schools are funded more richly than elementary schools. What I like about formulas is a greater sense that we are treating the campuses in a way that reflects their needs. Once you have a formula, everyone gets treated more equitably (DOC 24:5:178-187).

Strategy 3: Creating systems of communication

During interviews, the superintendent's strategy for effective communication with district staff was confirmed by central office staff, principals, and classroom teachers. The principals were unanimous in their praise of the

effectiveness of the superintendent's communication skills during his portion of the monthly principal meetings:

> We have monthly principal meetings and he's really very inspirational, probably the most gifted orator I've ever heard. He energizes everybody to go back to their campuses and deliver the same energizing message to their staffs (INT 12:10:226-229).

Another principal elaborated on the impact of these brief, but powerful communications:

> The superintendent talks with us for about 30 to 45 minutes at every monthly principal's meeting – really, it's my favorite part of the meeting. That's when he has the opportunity to redefine and emphasize his vision for the direction we should be going. He's motivating, he's inspiring, he's a visionary. He has all kinds of ideas. (INT 19B:20:823-835).

Finally, to a third principal, it was important that the information comes directly from the superintendent. He said:

> We walk out of that portion of the meeting educated. Whether we're talking about finance or student achievement, it is important that he directly understands and can articulate where we need to be and what we need to do. And he doesn't stand up there and say, you people need to get your act together. It is more of a support system – what is the plan, how can I help, what can I do? (INT 21:5:110-117).

Despite limited contact with the superintendent in such a large district, teachers provided evidence of the effectiveness of the superintendent's strategy to disseminate his vision and messages to district staff members through the pipeline of the campus principals. One teacher said,

> It goes directly from [the superintendent] to the principal, and to us. There's really no middleman. There are no stops along the way where by the time it gets to us, we're really not sure what was said in the beginning" (INT 22:10:248-251).

Another teacher added the following: "The way I would explain it is the fact that the principals take what he's saying to heart, and they really buy into it. They bring it back to us and we buy into it" (INT 22:10:259-262).

The superintendent's strategy to create a vertical system of communication among the principals in the area feeder pattern was considered to be very effective by principals and central office administrators. The feeder pattern meetings supported opportunities for vertical alignment of curriculum, sharing expenses for training, and for conducting action research. One principal said, "I think that's the glue that holds us together" (INT 20:9:199-201):

Another principal elaborated about the value of the area feeder pattern meetings to support vertical communication and alignment:

> I think vertical teaming is important. Four elementary schools feed into my school, and I only have the kids for two years. They come in the front

door and before I know it they're out the back door. So we work together on vertical alignment. For example, our students take writing at eighth grade. The only time they are tested prior to that is in the fourth grade. Our job is to transition these kids and make sure their writing is covered. We meet with those teachers and administrators periodically to make sure we are all focused. It helps a lot (INT 17:6:145-155).

Act V. Decentralizing Authority to District Campuses.

Evidence from interviews with principals, central office administrators, and classroom teachers clearly indicated a perception among district personnel that the leadership acts used by the superintendent to empower district campuses played a major role in the successful transformation achieved by the school district. Everyone agreed that the high level of empowerment at the school site to make relevant educational decisions coupled with adequate resources and technical support from central office staff members became powerful tools for achieving success in the district. Effective strategies used to empower district campuses included: 1) implementing SBM; 2) empowering campus principals; 3) empowering classroom teachers; and 4) building capacity of campus personnel.

Strategy 1: Implementing SBM.

Without exception, interview respondents affirmed the perception that the superintendent exercised a pure and effective interpretation and implementation of Senate Bill One and site-based management which set Mariposa ISD apart

from other districts. Examples follow which demonstrate effective implementation of SBM at schools across the district. As one principal pointed out:

> The site-based movement has begun everywhere, but I've visited other school districts where they still have the central control. If you talk with teachers and principals in [a neighboring school district], there's really no SBM—it's all top down. They have the state mandate, but the way it's interpreted is different (INT 23:11:280-287). (INT 19:29:659-666).

During interviews with teacher focus groups, all teachers supported the superintendent's interpretation of the state policy of SBM as an effective strategy to empower district campuses and improve district performance:

> I think the biggest change he's made is to allow SBM to be real. We've had more liberty to do SBM than any other district. SBM has empowered teachers to participate in site-based committees. It has given teachers more opportunity for input into personnel, budget, and curriculum issues. Though we don't always get exactly the results we want, that knowledge has empowered teachers more (INT 23:1:16-23).

The CEIC, according to one principal, was "the working committee of the campus — the leadership of the campus" (INT 1:4:152-153). "Every school has their team, and they're very powerful" (INT 22:8:187-192). The district successfully integrated site-based management into the workplace by establishing

training, policies, and guidelines for implementation of the SBM teams (INT 13:5:90-95).

Principals and teachers asserted that campus planning and budget development was a shared, collaborative process at their campuses, a function of the CEIC. A focus group of teachers stated, "Campus action plans are not written by a couple of people. The whole school gets involved and has a say in what needs to be done" (INT 22:8:193-195). The campus plan was described by one principal as a meaningful, working document that was based on campus priorities and reflected in the campus budget (INT 1:5:185-189). She also stated, "You do the campus plan and budget simultaneously. You've got to have the money for the things you put in the plan or you don't do them" (INT 1:5:185-189).

Site-based control over campus and departmental budgets was highly valued among district personnel. A theme repeated often in interviews with teachers, principals, and central office administrators was: "If you don't have decision-making powers over money, you don't have decision-making powers, period. What else is there?" (INT 15:6:131-132). All data revealed that the superintendent was credited with the responsibility for devolving the authority over budgets to district campuses. One principal remarked,

> The great thing for me was right at the time that I went on board, Senate Bill One had passed and our superintendent took it to the letter of the law and he put all of the funds on the campuses (INT 18:9:268-272).

According to principals, central office staff, and teachers, during early implementation of SBM, there was a steep learning curve as principals and site-based committees assumed almost total control over their campus budgets. The opportunity to manage their budgets was problematic for principals and their site-based teams until people figured out how to efficiently spend their money. As one principal said, "At first I was overwhelmed and then I calmed down. I thought to myself, 'Barb, just run this school like you would run your own house' (INT 18:11:309-314).

As a result of intense training and support from central office and empowerment over their budgets, the level of competence about matters of finance increased dramatically among principals and their instructional staff. One principal noted, "You have to make very involved decisions, but it gives you the opportunity to control your own destiny — to be able to put the money where you think your students are going to benefit the most" (INT 19:27:595-597; INT 18:27:803-807; INT 18:10:286-289).

While the control over resources provided principals much greater freedom over spending, on the other hand, as one principal noted, "It brought on a surge of accountability because you could not go over budget and expect someone else to pay it off for you. You had to stay within your limits" (INT 21:2:47-48).

From a central office perspective, supporting and monitoring the

diverse budgets of approximately sixty site-based campuses provided unique new challenges for the district's office of finance. Nevertheless, the superintendent's strategy to put money out on the campuses was perceived to be highly effective by members of the school district. A central office finance administrator described the positive effects of the new approach:

> I like to think that resources are used better because the campuses know what it is they really need and buy what they need. If I learn how to handle my money myself, then hopefully I do it better than if my mother were still trying to spend it for me (DOC 24:2:74-76).

In addition to the intended results, the superintendent's decentralization strategy to put the money out on the campuses produced an unanticipated benefit to the district. Having more money under their direct control created the impression among the staff of increased wealth in the district. The district's financial officer explained the paradigm shift:

> We used to have a request process during budget development where people could ask for things in addition to their base budget. We got volumes of ridiculous requests, and people knew that 90% of those didn't get funded. Now, we get very few requests and they're more reasonable and manageable. We went to a formula, and campuses get so many dollars for their number of students, and they can do whatever they want with it. So if there is anything extra that people want, they have to be wise

> enough to plan for it and manage within their allotment. So, I think it's because we don't have to cut the budget during the development process that people think we're better off than we were. That as much as anything else changed how people think about the district. But we didn't get any richer overnight (DOC 24:12:462-486).

In addition to responsibility over supplies, capital outlay, and miscellaneous expenses, under the superintendent's decentralization strategy, campuses exercised virtually total control over their personnel budgets and were able to design the staffing configurations for the personnel units they employed. A focus group of teachers said, "If we want, we can have an assistant principal or two counselors, or no counselors and three P.E. teachers. That's really remarkable in this district" (INT 22:12:295-298). A central office administrator added,

> The duties of these support people vary from school to school. So each school looks different. There are teams of people at some elementary and middle schools that are just fabulous. At the high school level, we have two schools that have gone from the traditional assistant principals to Deans of Instruction. That means they're talking instruction now (INT 20:7:156-170).

All interviews pointed to the success of the new superintendent's strategy to devolve decisions about professional development to principals and their SBM

teams and to provide ample resources to support staff development. With new sources of funding and authority, principals began to use campus budgets to fund teacher travel to workshops and seminars. A principal reported the success of these efforts:

> Because [the superintendent] placed money on the campuses, I was able to let [teachers] travel to different places in the state to study successful programs. The programs or initiatives selected had to be based on best practices research, and they would come back and share what they learned with the entire staff (INT 18:10:297-301).

A teacher described the effectiveness of the site-based approach to training:

> Once people started going out and attending conferences, we became a much better educated group of individuals. That doesn't happen in other places. It really is a district thing, and I think it's at every school. First of all, it's having a strong staff development program and now pushing it down to the schools and saying, it's not provided for you anymore -- you're going to have to do it yourself (INT 22:15:380-388).

Finally, the combination of strong instructional leadership and empowerment at the school site allowed principals and their staffs the freedom to assume ownership over their staff development programs. A principal of an

exemplary elementary school statement clarified the important role of the principal as instructional leader of staff development at the school site:

> I think the best staff development comes from our own campus. I take staff development very seriously. I've got to be able to teach people, and they've got to look to me as an expert. Not just someone who maintains a building (INT 19:8:182-20).

The combination of empowerment and support has proved to be a successful formula for transforming schools in Mariposa. Principals, teachers, and central office administrators were unanimous in tracing the success of district campuses to decentralization of authority to the district campus. A campus principal summarized the feelings expressed in all interviews:

> The things the superintendent let us control were so critical. The district provides you a supportive environment, and they allow you to control the factors of success – that's personnel, staff development, and the budget. You get to hire the people that you want, you get to train them in the manner that you think is the most effective, and then you have the money to put where you think your students are going to benefit the most. There is no excuse for principals and schools to not be successful in our district (INT 19B:31:1278-1288).

Strategy 2: Empowering campus principals.

Many staff members believed that the key measure of effectiveness in the district was the superintendent's devolution of authority to the campus principals. To support each principal in meeting their achievement goals all departments in the district were focused on meeting the needs of the campus principals with training, resources, and technical support:

> I think what the superintendent allowed to happen was the empowerment of that campus leadership. They will never be the same again. And I think that even someone in my [central office] position would not be satisfied in another district. For people who truly believe in public education, I never thought I'd get the opportunity to work in this kind of environment. It is the most exciting thing that's happened to me in my whole career. To see where we were and where we are; to know what he has allowed us to do, and the relationships we have with our campuses. We've come of age during the superintendent's tenure, and I don't think anyone will be satisfied with less (INT 13:14:309-318).

It was also widely acknowledged in the district that the superintendent was willing to empower his principals because he took great care to place people in campus leadership positions who were strong instructional leaders, who were perceived to be worthy of autonomy and respect, and who were capable of leading their schools to the highest levels of academic performance. Teachers said, "The

principals are very strong, very high energy. It is contagious, I do believe. We have our very own [leader] here on campus so we really don't need to hear the higher voice. She brings it down to us" (INT 22:11:270-272).

In describing the level of empowerment and support provided by the superintendent, principals stated the following: "I think he set out the vision for us, and did not micromanage the process for getting there (INT 13:8:182-183). Echoing the sentiments of the superintendent, principals "expressed the belief that they will be supported absolutely" by the superintendent "as long as they do their job well" (INT 7:14:388-389). One principal described the positive results of the superintendent's strategy to empower principals and support district campuses:

> He has a vision of where he is going, of what he wants to happen on the end. He tells people where he wants to be and then tells you to get it there, however you want to do it. He provides the funding for it, and allows the freedom to figure out ways to do it. I have enjoyed it. To take my knowledge and to develop the staff to meet that goal and to have the support system underneath to reach it — I never would have been able to do that without him (INT 1:7:385-392).

From the perspective of teachers, central office administrators, and principals, the superintendent provided principals the freedom and autonomy to generate diverse programmatic solutions to meet the needs of their campuses. The strategy to permit district schools to go in different directions was considered

to be a highly effective method to support school success. During interviews, teachers and principals offered examples when the superintendent served as an advocate to support the principals' autonomy, their decision-making authority, and the freedom to define their own process (INT 25:3:10-11). One principal made the following statement:

> When he hired me to be a principal, I said 'What are your expectations of me? He just said, 'I want your students to perform at a high level. That's why we're putting you at that campus.' And then I said, 'Well, what can I expect from you?' And he said, 'Well, you will never find a better place than this and a better superintendent to work for than me. He said, 'Go in there, shake things up, do whatever you have to do, and I will be there to support you.' (INT 19:4:84-94).

Another principal offered evidence that the superintendent defended her authority to make autonomous programmatic decisions for her campuses:

> The superintendent has always supported me in my decisions. For example, the assistant superintendent wanted to implement a particular science program across the district, but I declined because my campus had already picked another program. So, the assistant asked the superintendent to axe my case, but the superintendent said, 'No, leave her alone and see what happens.' I was very successful with what I did. That took a strong leader to allow me to do that. If you stifle people's

> creativity, from the custodial level to the central office level, they will become little robots (INT 1:7:368-382).

Another example from an exemplary elementary campus principal follows:

> Our philosophy about bilingual education is different than most campuses in the district. We want to go in a different direction. We offer a transitional bilingual program. We think it's highly successful, but the rest of the district wants to go with a dual language approach. Although the superintendent highly supports the dual language approach, he encouraged us to make our own decision. He told me, 'Do it. Time will tell which approach is more successful.' And, so, we have a real stake in this bilingual program. One, we want to produce students who are truly high performing and bilingual. And, two, we want to prove our method is better than the method used by the other schools because we absolutely believe that it is. He let us do that! (INT 19:5:99-111).

According to those interviewed, it was understood that the most important thing about the diversity of approaches was not the particular program or approach selected, but the freedom to choose. From the perspective of teachers, principals, and central office members, the authority to make decisions about the content and processes of instruction created greater ownership and responsibility among the schools for the programs they chose (INT 14:10:228-235; INT

4:13:320-325). A central office staff member said, "It's the combination of taking ownership and feeling that freedom (INT 20:9:189).

Strategy 3: Empowering classroom teachers

When the superintendent decentralized authority to the principals, he subsequently encouraged and enabled them to empower their teachers. During all interviews, teachers and administrators described the high level of teacher empowerment achieved as a result of the superintendent's restructuring plan. As previously described, data pointed to a host of professional development initiatives designed to build capacity and develop the leadership potential of talented teachers. To support such initiatives, the district established policies and procedures to facilitate the implementation of SBM. As a result, principals in Mariposa trained their SBM teams to participate actively in the processes of campus planning and decision-making. One principal reported:

> Empowering me allows me to empower the teachers. And empowering the teachers puts a little excitement back into what they do on a daily basis. For example, I now tell the teachers that nothing is impossible. If there is a problem, we can pretty much do whatever we want to fix it. We can rearrange the bell schedule if we want, and I don't have to ask anybody. I just have to notify the parents and the community. Ten years ago I could not have said that because there were too many barriers (INT 4:9:219-225).

A highly successful initiative specifically developed by the superintendent to empower teachers and "shift the money into the hands of the implementers" was the district mini-grant program (INT 7:5:124-125). As a result of this successful program, many teachers who became proactive in writing and submitting innovative grant proposals received thousands of dollars in funding for local projects. According to a central office administrator, "Teachers who are awarded a mini-grant are pretty much empowered to do whatever they want without any interference from the district" (INT 15:16:350-359).

Strategy 4: Building capacity of campus personnel.

A focus group of teachers verified the existence of a new way of thinking and behaving in the district as they described a culture of professionalism at their campus and evidence of a highly collaborative learning community:

> It's establishing the condition of learning for everyone, and we really are a learning organization so our teachers are constantly learning. Our administrator models that. Our students see that. We [the faculty] meet every Friday morning for professional development or other concerns. Our principal is with us on Friday mornings, and we all know what everyone is doing. Our goal is to be teachers teaching teachers. Sometimes the training relates to topics mandated from central office such as sexual harassment; or teachers bring in strategies to share with other teachers. We used to have teachers who would lock their doors. Now

> everyone on this campus is opening their doors and inviting people into their classrooms to share lessons and learn from each other. Our principal is adamant that we need to have an open door policy and not be afraid of one another. Everyone is working together for the same goal (INT 22:2:36-65:104-106).

An interview with a focus group of teachers at an exemplary elementary school also revealed evidence that the empowerment invested in teachers has resulted in high degrees of professional expertise at their campus:

> We work together and help each other. We make our own decisions about curriculum, staff development, and we know what to do. Teachers go and look at new programs — they come back and tell the principal what they learned instead of the other way around (INT 25:3:5-6).

Act VI: Creating Systems of Accountability.

The evidence collected from all interviews consistently reflected the remarkable success of the strategies used by the superintendent to implement and enforce a rigorous system of accountability in the district of Mariposa. The superintendent employed leadership acts to develop a district accountability system that linked closely with the state accountability system based on TAAS student performance data and AEIS accountability ratings. Emerging from the data were five strategies used by the superintendent to create systems of accountability: 1) establishing standards of performance; 2) monitoring

performance; 3) enforcing consequences; 4) linking processes of accountability and SBM; and 5) creating norms of continuous improvement.

Strategy 1: Establishing standards of performance.

The superintendent established a system of internal accountability mechanisms and standards of performance that held all district employees accountable for results. Accountability was infused throughout the system to focus everyone's energies toward "ensuring the educational opportunity of each of our students" (INT 5:2:33-34). A principal illustrated the broad implications of accountability that were implemented at all levels of the district organization:

> I tightened up a lot of things immediately [when I took over my campus]. For example, there was about $18,000 in lost textbooks in the accounts. And the staff would do fund-raisers, but nobody knew where the money went. If a kid sold everything and spent all the money or if a student lost a textbook, the attitude was, 'Oh, these poor kids. We can't expect them to pay because they are poor.' There were no systems of accountability for anyone. Not for the teachers, not for the students, not for the custodians. The place was a dump; it was filthy. So the first thing we did was a huge thing on self-responsibility for everyone in the building and there would be follow-through and monitoring and that I would not hold them to a standard lesser than I held myself (INT 18:7:229-230).

Strategies 2 & 3: Monitoring performance and enforcing consequences.

Because everyone's performance evaluation was tied to student performance, data were used effectively as a fair and impartial standard to monitor and assess the performance of teachers, principals, and central office administrators and to "level" district campuses based on TAAS results and the AEIS accountability ratings (INT 2:3:108; INT 6:9:342-343). A combination of pressure and support for change was applied equitably throughout the district by the superintendent and the Assessment and Support Teams to maintain focus on district expectations, to monitor performance results, and to provide the resources and the technical intervention necessary to ensure success with "low-performing" campuses (INT 14:9:218-223; INT 19:35:793-796).

Everyone understood the implications of failure to meet the district expectations for student performance. Principals knew they were expected to improve their campus rating to a "recognized" or "exemplary" level within a three-year period or risk losing their jobs (INT 19B:6:245-253). In turn, principals monitored the progress of teachers and students at their campuses, and held staff members accountable for performance results. One principal described the plan he used to improve the quality of his faculty when assigned to a "low-performing" elementary campus by the new superintendent:

> We interviewed all of the teachers, visited classrooms, and we assessed their performance. And 40% of those teachers are still here, and 60% of

them are new. And those that are still there, for the most part, we are very fortunate to have. They have always been committed. They have always been successful, but they have not always had the same surrounding cast (INT 19B:5:167-175)

Another principal selected a different approach to upgrade the quality of her faculty. She preferred to develop the skills of teachers rather than non-renew their contracts. She described her philosophy in the following way:

I have never fired anybody, but I have made major improvements in individual staff members based on the documentation in targeted areas of improvement. My belief system is to take them from where they are and my greatest joy is to see the improvement. I have a teacher who was a mediocre reading teacher. She is now my right hand assistant. (INT 1:6:353-362).

Statements made during interviews with central office staff members also reflected a commitment to accountability for improving student performance at the central office level. A central office administrator stated, "Accountability is a big factor in this district. So just like the principals are accountable for their schools, we in central office are accountable for the same thing" (INT 20:3:60-63). Another central office member stated,

This year our focus is definitely high schools, and so I've got three staff members assigned to each of the high schools that I serve. If we're

serious about moving high schools forward then central office people have to put their money where their mouth is (INT 13:5:102-107).

The effectiveness of the superintendent's accountability strategies were reflected in the immediate and remarkable gains in student performance. Teachers in a highly successful, recognized middle school described the performance gains that occurred when the entire school accepted responsibility for ensuring academic success of every child:

> We are a recognized middle school, and that is really incredible because of our school population. And did you hear about our scores? We have teachers and kids producing three and four year jumps in a single school year, and we have them only for two years. I've seen kids come here at the beginning of the year referred to as special education because they could hardly write their names and by the end of the year they were passing TAAS and were able to read. I think part of it is that we take the kid from where he is and move him forward (INT 22:17:429-439).

The following statement reflects the way a building principal applied the superintendent's "no excuses" philosophy to ensure that all students were academically successful in her building:

> There will be no failures in this building. I need to tell you that for me its 'A,' 'B,' and 'not yet.' So our goal is making sure that every child is successful. In the beginning there was a little resistance, and I had a

> couple of teachers leave. We now have created such a culture of success that it's there for kids, it's there for teachers, and there's just nothing they think they can't do (INT 18:21-22:572-581; 629-631).

The staff attributed the effectiveness of the district accountability system not to the policies themselves but to the skill of the superintendent in interpreting and enforcing them in the district (INT 13:3:47-52; INT 14:209-211). The administrative staff was influenced by the superintendent's "seriousness of purpose" about holding them accountable for improving test scores (INT 17:3:54-55). They were motivated by the consequences that would occur if they failed to meet the district performance expectations. As an example, one principal stated, "I think, first of all, he came in and when he met with us, he was not too friendly, and I think there was a little bit of fear because he's such a strong personality, he has very strong beliefs, and there's no doubt who's in charge" (INT 19B:12:481-484). The superintendent explained his approach by saying,

> I don't think leadership can be all positive. Because of human nature, I don't think fear is necessarily a bad thing, sometimes. I had to establish a system that said, 'These are the wonderful, positive things that can happen, but if you don't play ball, there are some negative things that are also going to happen'" (INT 7:6:141-145).

He also stated, 'They knew that I was a kind of cheerleader for them, but I

was also capable of dismissing them. That was very important (INT 7:6:144-149).

Strategy 4: Linking processes of accountability and SBM

While accountability was an important topic of conversation and a critical theme on the superintendent's agenda for success, the concept of accountability was rarely considered in isolation. In Mariposa ISD, the term accountability was often discussion in relation to its counterpart—SBM—which was defined by principals and teachers as the freedom to control the factors of success at the school site: budget, personnel, and staff development.

Interviews with principals, teachers, and central office administrators revealed that staff members understood and supported the effectiveness of the superintendent's interpretation of accountability and site-based management as interdependent processes as well as the highly visible manner in which they were implemented in the district (INT 16:7:187-192; INT 9:7:190-194). Schools that increased their performance and earned "recognized" or "exemplary" accountability ratings gained relative freedom and autonomy from central office involvement while lower performing schools were subjected to careful monitoring and oversight by the central office team (INT 1:3:88-95; INT 7:1:10-13; INT 16:30:915-917). Staff members believed this strategy was very successful in motivating high achievement gains throughout the district campuses.

As an example, during a focus interview with teachers at an exemplary

middle school, the instructional specialist for the campus described the relationship between the accountability ratings received by the campus principal and the amount of freedom and autonomy earned by the campus:

> I served for a while on a central office team. We had fourteen campuses to monitor. It was amazing from building to building how much impact the principal has. [The superintendent] praises them, but also comes down on them. Basically, if they produce results, they're kind of left alone, and the weak principals are really pressured. Maybe that's why we don't see him very often on our campus. (INT 22:11:274-282).

Principals, in particular, expressed strong sentiments about the important relationship between freedom and accountability as a new way of doing business in Mariposa ISD. One said, "You visualize where you want to be. We get to figure out at our campus what we need. And the superintendent lets us go in that direction and provides us the resources we need to effectively implement the system. Now, the only caveat is, you have to be successful (INT 19B:6:247-252). According to another, "You know, you have a lot of freedom under [the superintendent], but you have such a high rate of accountability. You have to prove that you take care of all kids, every kid" (INT 9:7:190-194). Finally, an exemplary elementary principal explained:

> The superintendent is the key to all this. He would say over and over 'High performance is not negotiable, but the way to get there is.' The

> concept of accountability is critically important, and you can't have site-based management without accountability. They have to go together. Site-based management without holding someone responsible is meaningless. You must have control over the factors of success – budget, personnel, and staff development. Now if we are not successful, it is my fault. There's no place to hide (INT 19:30:670-675).

Strategy 5: Creating norms of continuous improvement

The opportunity for campus principals and their staffs to make important decisions about the critical factors of success — personnel, budget, and instruction — coupled with clear accountability for student performance, created a powerful dynamic in Mariposa ISD that spurred innovation and led the district to norms of continuous improvement in student performance (INT 15:3:65-71).

As accountability for student performance became purposeful, achievement in the district subsequently increased. The success of children and staff generated a level of expectation among the school community in which high performance was the norm. An elementary principal explained,

> As the scores continued to improve, and now they see all this stuff about exemplary schools in the newspaper and on television, they expect it again!! They have a right to expect a high quality education for their children (INT 19B:18:724-728).

Teachers, principals, and central office administrators provided numerous examples of the expectation that the district was in motion along a path of continuous improvement. Below, a central office administrator described school improvement as a dynamic process that is never completed:

> You know, we have not arrived, and I think we're moving now to another level. What we need to understand is that school improvement is a process. And we're never there. Once all our campuses are "exemplary," and it will occur even at the high schools, we will expect improvement in the number of students who achieve academic recognition in reading, writing, and math. We will expect an increase of 10% a year. Our work is not finished. But we're poised to do it (INT 13:13:281-292).

In Mariposa, the superintendent and his staff continuously raised the bar and redefined expectations as district performance grew higher and higher. A middle school principal described the difficult challenge of continuing to improve as schools approached exemplary levels of performance.

> We getting pretty close to the top, and the closer you get to the top, the harder it is to move. However, I still see the success ahead. Our goal for this year is to step into "exemplary" status and also to raise the number of students who are receiving academic recognition. The key is to always set your expectations high so no matter where you are, you can always be better (INT 8:8:183-189).

The combination of the superintendent's leadership strategies in Mariposa ISD created a success synergy that took on a life of its own. An elementary principal described the electric atmosphere of a district in forward motion:

> We have also developed a culture of success. Our kids know now they are smart. They expect to do well. Our teachers know that the expectations are high, and they expect to do well. The momentum that develops from this culture of success is like the law of physics — a body in motion tends to stay in motion and a body at rests tends to stay at rest. We're in motion, and it's fun. And we're going to continue to go forward (INT 19B:4:122-142).

Research Question Three

How were the strategies and leadership acts linked to student performance?

Although the political and managerial roles of the superintendent physically removed him from direct contact with classrooms and students in Mariposa ISD, throughout the interview data there was ample evidence from district staff members that the strategies and leadership acts implemented by the superintendent were perceived to be indirectly but fundamentally linked to the high rate of academic performance in the district. Emerging from the data were five categories of leadership behaviors that illustrate the perceived links between the leadership acts and strategies employed by the superintendent and student performance. These categories are presented below:

Transforming District Culture

Data revealed that the leadership acts and strategies used to transform district culture and build shared beliefs among district staff were perceived by study participants to be linked to high rates of student performance. Using visible symbols of success and strategies appropriate to the context and needs of the community, the superintendent altered beliefs and reshaped district culture to embrace new norms of innovation and student success, creating the conditions of that transformed the organization and led the district to high academic achievement (INT 14:9:207-209; INT 11:13:293-294; INT 17:19:220; INT 25:2:90-91). There was an explosion of creativity in the district of Mariposa. Diverse and unique new programs were in place, and people were motivated and energized by the level of innovation and the growing culture of success within the district (INT 8:7:159-160; DOC 26:7:387-392).

The superintendent challenged the prevailing belief system in the community and displaced it with the urgent expectation that all children could learn and would achieve at high levels, "no exceptions, and no excuses" (INT 15:2:24-26; INT 21:2:26-28). Those staff members who were unable to conform to the new beliefs were either replaced or left the district, leaving behind a new work force unified in their support of the superintendent's restructuring plan and motivated to meet high performance expectations (INT 20:4:97). Together, these changes formed a pivotal point from which all subsequent changes developed.

A central office administrator explained the view that the high rate of student performance achieved under the superintendent's leadership occurred as a direct result of shared beliefs about the potential for high-poverty, minority children to achieve at high levels. From this perspective, the superintendent's insistence on a shared belief was the fundamental step that paved the way for the district's success:

> Belief is the most important thing, belief in the clients we serve. It is more important than any training, any program. If you don't believe in the unlimited potential of the children, you're not going to get results. The key issue was getting a belief system embraced by all levels of personnel within the organization. Then, because we believed in the untapped potential of the clients we served, it was up to us to build the infrastructure to draw it out and so we began to put into place very focused plans that allowed no excuses for poor student performance. (INT 16:1:42-48; INT 16:6:310-314).

The following statement by another central office administrator provided further evidence that the superintendent's strategy to alter the cultural beliefs about poor children and to establish a 'no excuses and no blame' mentality were the catalyst for the dramatic academic performance gains in the district:

> A couple of years ago, when the superintendent got sick, we decided to document what was driving up the scores. So we did an internal

> qualitative study that asked basically one question, 'What's different?' What we thought would happen when we asked, "What's driving up the scores, we would get [the answer] 'best practices,' but it always started out 'the superintendent did this,' 'the superintendent did that.' It started out with the belief that all kids can learn and that we can't blame kids and parents — if our kids are failing, it's because we're not doing our job. It went out like a mantra — no excuses!!! So nobody in Mariposa says, 'These poor kids' (INT 14:8:188-198).

Those who witnessed the explosive transformation of district performance under the superintendent's leadership became avid supporters of the new belief system. An elementary principal provided further evidence that the staff, not the students, were responsible for the condition of low performance in the district:

> At a nearby elementary school, far too many students were reading below grade level — pervasive low performance. A new principal brought this school from "low-performing" to "acceptable" in one year and then brought it to "recognized" in one more year. So it's not the children, it's the way we operate that makes the difference (INT 1:1:27-32).

Creating a Shared Vision of High Expectations

Other important acts of leadership that were linked to district success were the strategies employed by the superintendent to create an organizational vision of high expectations for student and staff performance and

to focus the district on student performance. As one central office administrator stated:

> I think critical to what we do was the leadership of the superintendent — he clearly articulated an emphasis on student performance and that we were not as good as we thought we were if our kids were not performing well (INT 13:8:165-170).

The superintendent's expectations were directly linked to student performance outcomes and, therefore, to the state accountability system. These expectations were set at the highest levels obtainable — well above the standards set by the state. He expected all children to graduate, prepared to be successful at a college or university, and fully bilingual as well. He stated often, "We will be an "exemplary" school district. That's not a goal; that's what we're going to do!" (INT 7:13:329-330). Not only did he set high standards for district performance, but data from all interviews demonstrated that the superintendent went about the task of building the capacity of his staff to meet those expectations.

A central office administrator said, "As I see his job, he set out the vision for us, and did not micro-manage our way of doing it" (INT 13:8:176-183). He communicated expectations and refocused everyone on the vision in a way that clarified the educational issues, affirmed guiding values, and channeled the collective energies of the staff in pursuit of shared goals (Tichy & Devanna, 1986;

Johnson, 1996). A central office administrator described the new sense of direction inspired by the superintendent:

> It's not his title or your title that is going to reign here; it's the power of the idea. In it, the beliefs about the children, the belief of ownership and trust and this interdependency of site-based decision-making and accountability all come together through this organizational focus. I think those are the four major things that are occurring in this system. (INT 16:10:287-292; 297-300).

In response to the superintendent's visionary leadership, the staff grew to accept and overlook the superintendent's arrogant and abrasive personality and to value the clear expectations for success, accountability for results, strategies of support, and the organizational focus he brought to the district (INT 25:11:272-277). A middle school principal illustrated that the superintendent's unique leadership strategies created coherence in the district and set the stage for high performance gains:

> Although there are times when I disagree with him and when he is abrasive, there's a strong affinity with the superintendent. We feel he cares about us and that he's there to help us. He came in from California like a bull in a china shop and cleaned house. It shocked us all. Then, suddenly everything became focused. And then our scores started going up and up, doubling every year (INT 17:8:191-201).

In the beginning, many people questioned the reasonableness of the superintendent's vision statement and high performance expectations considering the high rate of poverty among the student population (INT 22:4:93-95). However, due to the record of proven success at campuses all across the district, virtually all district personnel who were interviewed, including teachers, principals, and central office personnel, supported the notion that high expectations have become the norm in Mariposa ISD. Recognizing the relationship between expectations and performance, one central office administrator stated, "Everyone understands that it's about the performance of all students. I know these may be clichés to you, but that is our expectation" (INT 13:12:259-260).

Restructuring the District Organization

Although research does not establish a clear case to confirm or deny the influence of site-based management and decentralization on student performance, data in this study indicated the staff universally linked the superintendent's devolution of authority to district campuses to increased student performance. Teachers, principals, and central office staff expressed the belief that the passage of legislative mandates in the areas of accountability and decentralization played an important role in the development of the superintendent's leadership strategies to improve performance in the district. The consensus among teachers, principals, and central office administrators was that the timing of the implementation of the

state accountability system and Senate Bill One coincided with the superintendent's entry into the district, and he used these policies to structure and leverage his agenda for change (INT 8:2:30-46; INT 13:7:151-155).

All interviews revealed that district personnel believed the impact of state policy related to site-based management was mediated by their superintendent's aggressive interpretation and implementation of the policy. Believing that decisions should be made by those who were closest to the students, the superintendent exercised a pure and robust interpretation of site-based management that included restructuring and downsizing the district's central office; altering the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of its members; and devolving tremendous authority to the campus principals and their site-based teams (INT 14:1:21-22; INT 19:18:407-414). Data revealed that the superintendent's enthusiasm about the potential for addressing district needs and leveraging change with the reform policy appeared to impact the successful implementation of the restructuring plan.

In order to provide a more efficient support system to improve student achievement at the campuses, the superintendent reorganized the staff from central office instructional divisions into four Assessment and Support Teams. All interview data revealed the perception that the teams were instrumental in raising student performance because of the combination of pressure and support they provided low-performing campuses (INT 1:3:88-95). Over and over again,

data demonstrated that campus performance improved as a result of the intervention and support provided by the Assessment and Support Teams (INT 13:4:87-88; INT 8:184-187; INT 21:2:51-58; INT 19:3:62-66). A campus principal described a prevailing perspective on the influence of the teams on student performance gains in the district:

> The restructuring [of central office] with the assessment team concept was a very important element that led to higher student achievement. These people were no longer supervisors and subject area specialists but a team of people focused on improving student learning. As the team began examining instruction all over the district, it became apparent that there were a variety of instructional strategies being used and some methods are more effective than others. As the effective practices were identified, the teams developed strategies for sharing the information. One way was to learn how the strategies were done and design professional development to offer to other schools. Another way was to arrange for teachers to visit other campuses and observe exactly how the strategies were used in classrooms. That's a new perspective that the team brought to the district. A movement began [in the district] to share best practices and get focused on what you are supposed to be teaching at a particular grade level. The changes in the district have evolved mostly because there was a lot of

sharing, and I think the major player from Central Office was the division of instruction (INT 8:3:64-71).

Decentralizing Authority to District Campuses

Interviews with teachers, principals, and central office staff members consistently revealed the firm belief that "a critical factor influencing high student performance in the district" was the strong authority and control exercised by the schools in managing their own operations" (INT 8:2:30-40). A participant in an elementary teacher focus group stated, "Site-based management – it's everything in relation to achievement" (INT 25:2:11-12).

An important result of site-based management was that it contributed to the development of ownership and responsibility among principals and teachers for their programs. A central office director explained, "We are demonstrating through decentralized management, by giving them resources and autonomy, along with the accountability that goes with it, that we get greater ownership for what needs to be done (INT 16B:6:289-291). Another central office administrator asserted, "It's a combination of taking ownership and feeling that freedom" that leads to high levels of achievement (INT 20:9:192-193).

Empowering Campus Principals

The superintendent's strategy to empower, develop, and support the campus principals was determined by district personnel to be an important factor resulting in the high academic performance of the district campuses (INT 15:3:68-

71). First, he placed people in campus principal positions who possessed strong instructional skills and the ability to lead their staffs to high levels of performance, and, second, he provided them with unprecedented levels of freedom and authority over the factors of success — instruction, staff development, personnel, and budget (INT 8:2:33-41; INT 16B:5:271-283; INT 13:16:346-348) — and the support they needed to ensure success.

Extraordinary effort by central office personnel was focused on providing campus principals the training, financial resources, technical assistance, and data needed to remove barriers to school success and to empower them to act. A culture of professional development helped principals strengthen their skills and enabled them to lead their campuses more effectively (INT 12:8:190-196; INT 16B:5:271-283). A campus principal commented on the positive effects of this strategy:

> I think the trend toward the principal as instructional leader has been a major component in the events leading to high achievement in this district. I think our new superintendent had quite a bit of influence over that. He started hiring principals who could fulfill the role of instructional leader rather than a campus manager. When the principal is knowledgeable about curriculum and instruction, they set the tone about best research-based instructional practices, and they guide the teachers in that particular direction (INT 8:2:30-46).

The superintendent and central office redirected district resources, training, and technical assistance to campus principals to support them in their improvement efforts. One of the tools developed to assist principals and campuses in analyzing performance scores and improving instruction was district data analysis of both state assessment and local benchmark assessment data; each campus received a wealth of disaggregated data and training to help staff members diagnose the learning needs of students (INT 3:9:365-370).

In interviews with teacher focus groups, teachers verified the importance of data analysis to the improvement of student performance. One teacher said, "Every teacher knows where each one of their students is on the TAAS. That really impacts our instruction because we know what the kids need now" (INT 22:7:177-180). Another teacher asserted, "The thing that our superintendent does is provide disaggregated data. It's the greatest tool and that's why we can do what we do" (INT 18:24:714-722).

The superintendent initiated another successful strategy to assist campus principals in improving student performance by supporting their authority to make tough personnel decisions to upgrade the quality of their staff. An elementary principal described the importance of campus control over personnel decisions:

> If you want to turn a school around, 80% of it is personnel. In order to improve campus performance, we had to make some personnel moves. Initially there were a bunch of grievances. He helped me by saying, 'I'm

here. As long as you're performing within the realm of your authority, it's going to be supported. And that made all the difference (INT 19:6:118-120). All those jumps you see in our scores – jump after jump. It's because we put better people in place. That couldn't have been done without central office support (INT 19:6:130-133).

Empowering Classroom Teachers

When site-based management was implemented in Mariposa, the central office staff noticed a pattern emerging across the district. Teachers, who suddenly were provided opportunities to travel and to make informed instructional decisions, began to grow in efficacy and professionalism and to develop ownership for their programs (INT 23:1:16-23; INT 19:29:659-666). As empowered teachers began collaborating about instructional practices in their buildings, the achievement scores of their students began to go up. A central office director described the process:

> When the superintendent arrived and instituted site-based management, principals started sending teachers to conferences and on-site visits. Just prior to [the superintendent] coming in, the district had done a bunch of training with cooperative learning — they had done all of the best practices we are now saying are driving up scores. Training didn't mean a thing to those teachers until they went out and found their own consultant. They brought Sharon Wells in, and she trained them in the use of math

> manipulatives, and since it was their choice to bring her in, that's what made the difference. What we found was almost a *religiousness* to the procedure of how it went. They went out for travel, and they started coming back and sharing. It was at the point when teachers started visiting and sharing within the school that the scores started to go up. It's a process that they have to go through (INT 14:9:225-235).

Once again, although research is inconclusive about the influence of site-based management on student achievement, data in this study indicated the staff in Mariposa ISD universally linked the devolution of authority to district campuses and site-based management practices to improved student performance. In the following statement, a central office member described the tenuous relationship of increased control over decision-making to district outcomes:

> This site-based decision-making issue does not seem inclined to reverse itself any time soon. I think people for the most part across the state, and certainly across this district, are seeing this as a good philosophical direction. I think it's a reasonable assumption that SBM has had an impact on scores. I mean, I'm a fact kind of person, and since it hasn't been proven, and I don't know that it could be, but I think to the extent that people can be in control of their own lives, making them more content with what they're doing and feeling more in control, maybe good things

> come out of that. If your mind is thinking positive and successful because you feel good about being in control, then success can happen (DOC 24:4:160-166).

Creating Systems of Accountability

Among the leadership acts and strategies used by the superintendent to restructure the district organization and improve student performance, data revealed that the superintendent's leadership used to create and align the district accountability system to the external policies of accountability were clearly linked to student performance.

The superintendent's entry into the district coincided closely with the passage of Senate Bill One and the implementation of the state accountability system in Texas. Thus, he became the first superintendent to interpret state accountability policy and to design its implementation in the district of Mariposa. Unlike some leaders in other parts of the state who either resisted or buffered their districts from the effects of the reform policies, the visionary superintendent of Mariposa "moved toward the danger," embraced the new policies with infectious enthusiasm, and capitalized on the potential use of the accountability system as a lever for improving student performance. As one central office director explained:

> He put accountability in place. It was wonderful that the state has put together such a wonderful system — TAAS has been great for us. And

> then the assistant superintendent's genius at disaggregating data and consistently putting it in front of the staff in creative ways so that there are no excuses. You can get two things in life — reasons or results. And reasons don't count. So it has continually come back to, what are the results? (INT 14:8:188-224).

Aligning internal and external accountability systems.

The superintendent developed an internal accountability system that closely tied clearly communicated staff performance expectations and contract renewal with the state accountability system. Since performance evaluations of principals, teachers, and other administrators were tied to student assessment scores and accountability ratings, the superintendent and the central office staff were able to easily monitor student and staff performance and to hold people accountable for results (INT 4:7:26-88). As one principal said, "To be successful in this district, you have to get good scores" (INT 1:8:440-441).

The staff attributed the district's gains in student performance to the superintendent's accountability strategies partly because the superintendent used the power of his persona and the authority of his position to demonstrate to people his seriousness of purpose when it came to student performance and partly because the interventions applied produced quick, visible results. He employed aggressive actions such as the use of administrative transfers to move people around in the district, the 'mano a' mano' approach to evaluation with campus

principals, and drastic steps to reconstitute a high school for a pervasive condition of low performance (INT 22:11:282-284). A principal provided an example of how the superintendent established his authority and his expectations for student achievement in his first meeting with district principals:

> He's really a heck of a nice guy. But he didn't show us that for a while. He just came at it — 'This is the way it's going to be. I expect high student performance, period.' So everybody was looking around and everybody's thinking if you want your job to be there next year, you'd better get working. Now he's put us back on three-year contracts as long as we're successful. But he was tough. He didn't tell any jokes, he didn't smile much, and I think there was a little bit of fear – a respect, but fear – because he's a strong personality. I think a lot of people just didn't think they had a choice. If he says I've got to bring up scores, I've got to do it (INT 19:15:343-350).

Administrators and teachers used data effectively as a tool to monitor the performance of every student. A middle school teacher said, "We use data to find out what each individual student needs to be successful, and exactly what objective they need" (INT 22:7:169-170. The superintendent described how data enabled the district central office to monitor school success and enforce accountability:

> The accountability system helped us because it provided us with a kind of

> step-by-step assessment of where the kids were. When we reconstituted Bellview High School, we were expecting a public outcry from teachers' organizations and everybody else. But we were ready for them because we had information on the kids who were coming into that school and how well-prepared they were. For example, right now the only schools that are not "recognized" or "exemplary" in our district are six high schools. Now the pressure is on the high schools. What are you going to do about it? That's the beauty of the accountability system (INT 7:12:297-307).

From the perspective of district staff members, the strongest evidence to establish the success of the superintendent's accountability strategy were the remarkable gains in student performance occurring over a 6-year period. The district went from seven "low-performing" campuses in 1993 to "recognized" status for the district beginning in 1998. In 1999, all of the thirty-three elementary campuses were either "recognized" or "exemplary," all middle schools except one were "recognized," and one high school out of seven was "recognized." Gains in achievement increased steadily since that time, continuing to improve after the superintendent left the district in 2000. The gains were specifically tied to the accountability strategies put in place by the superintendent, "The superintendent is the key to all this. He would say, 'High performance is not negotiable, but the way to get there is'" (INT 19:30:670-671).

Campus principals and teachers spoke with pride about the dramatic achievement gains that occurred at their own campuses and across the district. A principal of an exemplary elementary school shared the following results:

> The most obvious success is the fact that the year before I became principal we had 37% of our students passing math, and now we have a 97% passing rate, the highest math scores in our district. We've gone from 50% passing reading the year prior to my coming to 91% meeting passing standards. We have made dramatic improvement in student performance at this campus (INT 19B:3:114-142).

Linking decentralization and accountability

Another critical strategy for leading accountability that clearly influenced performance outcomes was the superintendent's interpretation and implementation of district accountability policies in relationship to the state policies of decentralization and site-based management. The superintendent used accountability standards to apply pressure on principals to improve student performance in exchange for increased amounts of freedom and site-based control over campus programs. Poor academic performance by district campuses resulted in the loss of autonomy and a "shared decision-making" model with a central office monitoring team (INT 16:30:914-917). To assist principals and campuses in their improvement efforts, the superintendent and central office provided ample resources and technical assistance in response to varying levels of need and

requests by the campus principal. In the case of "low-performing" campuses, central office intervention and increased amounts of support were non-negotiable until the campus improved performance and "earned" their freedom and relative autonomy (INT 16:30:910-917). This highly visible leveling system of campuses, based on student performance ratings, served as an effective control mechanism in the context of the school community that yielded high returns in student achievement (INT 1:3:87-95).

A central office administrator expressed the factors leading to high scores and success in Mariposa schools:

> One of our principals worked in a district elsewhere in Texas where she had a lot of freedom to do things, but no support. Then she worked at another district where she had very little of either. When she came here, she felt the freedom to get the best instructional programs; she also had the instructional support whenever she needed it. Although she's a very effective and very knowledgeable administrator, she said without those factors, her school couldn't be where it is now. I think that's been one of our superintendent's mantras — 'Do whatever you need to do and we'll support you, as long as you produce results' (INT 20:12:265-280).

Establishing norms of continuous improvement

Through attention to the vision, empowerment of people, and support for

innovation, the superintendent set in motion a chain of events and processes that ultimately brought high performance to scale and led to norms of continuous improvement across the district. In the beginning, when one high-poverty campus achieved recognized status against overwhelming odds, the district staff awakened to the possibility that others could achieve the same results (INT 8:5:105-110). A campus principal of an elementary campus described what he believed to be the defining moment that altered the course of the district:

> I think a little taste of success helped push up the scores. We had one school in the Lower Valley that became "recognized." That school had a high-minority, low socioeconomic student body and traditionally had not done well on achievement tests. When that happened, it was a big eye opener for everybody. We made a commitment at our school because now we knew it could be done. Next year, seven schools were "recognized." Then two "exemplary" and 11 "recognized" and boom!! It exploded. It's because of the expectations. So now you've got 50 campuses and they have the obligation to demonstrate a high level of success. New teachers have told me, 'I don't want to be the one to let our school down.' And so they just raise the level of their performance or the school won't be "exemplary." So it's a culture of success that started slow and now it has blossomed. Everybody expects to be successful, and you don't want to be the one that's not (INT 19:21:439-472; 495-497).

In spite of remarkable gains in student performance, the superintendent and school staff continued to raise the bar toward higher and higher levels of performance. Teachers, principals, and central office staff expressed the belief in all interviews that "You can always get better" (INT 8:8:189) and that "School improvement is a process, and we're never there" (INT 13:13:283). The steady gains in academic performance across the entire district generated a level of expectation in which high performance was the norm. According to the superintendent, "We are striving for 100%. We have to have 100%" (INT 6:4:115).

Chapter Summary

Throughout the course of twenty-five on-site, semi-structured interviews, the perceptions of the superintendent, central office personnel, principals, and teachers, and a TEA Master were explored to determine the leadership strategies used by the superintendent which were responsible for the high rate of success in Mariposa ISD. Each person interviewed described the leadership acts of a strong superintendent who passionately believed in the ability of poor, Hispanic children to achieve at the highest levels and who used the state policies of reform to leverage restructuring and change in his district. The study describes the transformation of Mariposa ISD from a culture of deprivation to a culture of success where all children were given an equal life's chance.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Public debate and political reform activity have intensified over the last two decades as policymakers have imposed increasingly rigorous standards, high-stakes testing, and public reporting of data to enforce accountability in the public schools (Elmore, 1996; Fuhrman, 2003; Reeves, 2004). Today's demand for educational accountability is driven by a moral imperative to increase student performance for all students and to eliminate growing achievement gaps among student populations.

The purpose of this study was to examine the strategies and leadership acts employed by the superintendent to implement state-initiated reform in a high-poverty school district in Texas. In the turbulent policy environment of reform and accountability, superintendents are mandated to improve student performance and achieve equity and excellence for all students with strategies to bring reform to scale across their school districts (Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1989). It falls to leadership to engage others in a vision of a brighter future and to create the conditions and the environment for policy to succeed (Adams & Kirst, 1999; Cohen, 1996; Elmore, 2002; Fullan, 2001). Wills and Peterson (1995) note, "Superintendents are key environmental scanners, interpreters, and reactors in the face of state-initiated reforms" (p. 88). The superintendents' interpretations of reform policy, along with their sense of what is needed in the context of their

local school districts, give rise to the forms of leadership in which they engage (Leithwood, 1995; Musella, 1989; Wills & Peterson, 1995).

Despite the pivotal role the superintendent plays in interpreting, leveraging and implementing reform, limited research has been directed to understand the superintendents' leadership of educational reform in the context of a high-poverty school district (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Johnson, 1996; Leithwood, 1995; Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Skyrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). Previous studies have failed to analyze the complexity of taking reform to scale, or in establishing the effects of district level leadership on student achievement (Skyrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). Additionally, while there are a growing number of district effectiveness studies appearing in the literature, these continue to be far less abundant than studies of high-performing schools (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Elmore, 1995; Elmore, 1996; Stringfield & Datnow, 1998).

The current emphasis on educational accountability throughout the nation creates a need for policymakers and school district leaders to understand the leadership strategies and leadership acts used successfully by district leaders to implement policies of reform, and to increase student performance across their districts (Adams & Kirst, 1999). In environments of reform a new leadership emerges; only transformational leadership can engage all members of the organization in the democratic and collaborative processes of change and organizational improvement (Carlson, 1996). Carlson (1996) suggested that those who lead schools of the future must be adaptable and find processes that fit different contexts. The superintendent's leadership of reform is highly contextual.

Given the multi-dimensional nature of experiences encountered by superintendents within their school communities, there is a need to understand their leadership practices in relation to the contextual influences in which they derive (Leithwood, 1995). For this reason, in order to study the leadership strategies and acts employed by the superintendent to lead the district to success in an environment of reform, the following three questions were developed:

1. What are the strategies and leadership acts used by the superintendent to influence change in the district?
2. What is the perceived effectiveness of the superintendent's strategies and leadership acts?
3. How are the strategies and leadership acts linked to student performance?

The researcher used qualitative methodology and a single case study design in order to investigate the research questions listed above in depth and in detail. The district was selected by a purposive method to be representative of the following criteria: having 65% or more low socio-economic status students; having more than 50% of its schools earning a Recognized or Exemplary rating for the past two years on the state's Academic Excellence Indicator System; and having between 10,000 and 50,000 Average Daily Attendance (ADA). The subject of this study, the superintendent of Mariposa ISD, met and/or exceeded each of the sampling criteria established for selection.

The participants selected for this study were chosen by a purposive method and theoretical sampling based on school performance ratings reflecting

the above characteristics and discovery. The data for the study have been collected through a series of 22 one-on-one semi-structured interviews, three focus group interviews, observations of meetings, and district documents. Additionally, archival data on record at the Texas Education Agency between the years 1990-1999 were reviewed to gain an historical perspective of the district and to achieve triangulation of the data.

Separate interview protocols were developed to accommodate the differing perspectives of the participants regarding their perceptions of the leadership strategies and acts used by the superintendent to implement reform in his school district. All interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed for use in the data analysis process.

In this study, the data were analyzed using the systematic procedures of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Using the grounded theory technique of open-coding, a MacIntosh computer, and HyperRESEARCH© software, the data were coded, broken down, and incidents compared for similarities and differences. Once emerging categories were identified, the process of axial coding was used to reconnect the data into categories and sub-categories based upon relationships among the properties and dimensions of the phenomenon in the study. The results of the data analysis were presented in Chapter Four of this study. To enhance the possibility that the results of this case study were generalizable to other settings, every attempt was made by the researcher to maintain authenticity and adequacy through context-rich, explicit, and meaningful descriptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Important insights about the implementation of reform can be discovered by examining the leadership acts and strategies used by effective superintendents to implement reform initiatives in their districts. The insights gained from this study can be shared with educational practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to promote understanding about how effective superintendents and district level leaders establish the conditions for successful implementation of state-initiated reform policies. This study will broaden the knowledge base and, hopefully, provoke questions about the role of district leadership in bringing reform to scale in a high-poverty, urban school district.

Summary of Findings

Act 1: Assessing District Needs/Establishing an Agenda for Change

Upon entering the district, the first leadership act taken by the superintendent was to conduct a "firsthand assessment of the district," including its organizational structure, condition of low performance, and the context and culture of the school community in order to identify and analyze the underlying issues in the district and community, and to plan an aggressive approach to change. He said, "Get out there and find out what you have to work with. Take on an issue and immediately put your stamp on the district. From there you can take on the leadership."

Findings that emerged from interviews with all respondents revealed a variety of needs and forces both external and internal to the district. Evidence revealed the following conditions and pressures within the district for change:

- A culture of deprivation – impoverished students, impoverished facilities;
- A condition of low academic performance;
- An ineffective, top-heavy, organizational structure;
- An ineffective span of control;
- A climate of low expectations for student and staff performance;
- A negative climate in the school community which stemmed from perceived inequities in educational opportunities for disenfranchised groups of students within the school community;
- A lack of leadership within the school district;
- Significant problems of governance and low academic performance which resulted in the assignment of a TEA master to assist the district in addressing identified deficiencies;
- State-initiated reform policies mandating decentralization and accountability.

Together, the issues and needs identified above provided powerful levers for change to the new superintendent.

Act II: Transforming District Culture

According to Heifetz (1994), "In a crisis, instead of looking for saviors, we should be calling for leadership that will challenge us to face problems for which there are no simple, painless solutions — problems that require us to learn new ways" (p. 21). Study participants confirmed that the superintendent faced serious issues of governance, climate, and low academic performance upon his

entry into the district in 1992. An initial area of focus for the superintendent was the existing culture of deprivation and the pervasive climate of low expectations in the school community. Armed with moral purpose, a sense of urgency, and a passionate commitment to equity for all children (Fullan, 2001), the superintendent challenged the prevailing low expectations for poor, Hispanic children and insisted on shared beliefs that all children can learn and can achieve at the highest levels, "no exceptions, and no excuses." Data confirmed that employees who were unable to conform to the new beliefs were encouraged to leave the district. Those who remained and new people who followed accepted the 'no excuses' norm. In spite of the temporary upheaval created by these actions, the superintendent's strategy changed the work force and the culture in Mariposa ISD (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Findings from the study confirmed that after assessing the conditions and context of the school community, the superintendent employed additional strategies to transform the district culture. Hill and Celio (1998) called for system-wide reform strategies that create incentives for increasing school performance, school capacity, and opportunities for staff members to change how they serve students. Believing that "Everyone has talent, it's just a question of releasing it," the superintendent took steps to revitalize the district, unleash the power and potential of the staff, and promote a climate of success and continuous improvement in the schools. He used creative financing to fund a new building program, state-of-the-art technology, and to promote innovation. He modeled the way by developing an open system that embraced and rewarded experimentation.

Additionally, the superintendent's acumen with finances helped restore confidence in the fiscal stability of the school district, and built a perception that there was an abundance of resources to support district programs.

Data from all interviews demonstrated that when the superintendent altered beliefs and reshaped district culture, he created the conditions that transformed the organization and led the district to high academic achievement. Staff members attributed the superintendent's efforts to stimulate new ways of thinking, and to motivate staff as a means to increase student performance. Additionally, from the perspective of a central office administrator, the superintendent's insistence on shared beliefs was the first step on the road to district success. He stated, "Belief is the most important thing, belief in the clients we serve. If you don't believe in the unlimited potential of children, you're not going to get results."

Act III. Creating a Vision of High Expectations and a Focus on Results

According to Bennis and Nanus (1985, p. 89), who characterize vision as "a target that beckons," leaders transform their organizations by channeling the collective energies of the staff in the pursuit of a shared vision. Superintendents hold the responsibility for crafting and articulating the vision in a way that affirms guiding values, clarifies important educational issues, is relevant to the context of the community, and is championed by the superintendent, "both in word and in deed" (Johnson, 1996, p. 88).

The superintendent of Mariposa exercised leadership acts to create an organizational vision of high expectations for student and staff performance.

According to study participants, the standards were set at the highest levels obtainable as an intentional lever to drive up test scores. The superintendent expected the district to achieve an "exemplary" rating according to the AEIS indicators. The standard of excellence for students set by the superintendent, and commonly repeated by other staff members as the preferred measure of success, was *100 by 100*, meaning 100% of the students 100% of the time.

The superintendent used the vision statement to focus the entire organization on student performance and, ultimately, on the quality of instruction. The statement read that all students in the district were expected to graduate from high school, regardless of their race or economic condition, fully bilingual, and prepared to enter a four-year college or a university, if they chose to attend. This statement set an expectation for high achievement and, according to the superintendent, became the driver of all instructional decisions in the district.

When all the study data were pulled apart and reconnected, it was apparent that all parts of the system, including shared beliefs, the vision, the internal and external policies of accountability and decentralization, and the organizational support structures were aligned to support teaching and learning in the schools. The leadership acts which aligned all organizational activities to the improvement of student achievement created coherence and focus across the entire district.

Clearly, all interviews revealed that the superintendent was the architect of the vision, and received credit for crystallizing the vision statement into a succinct but powerful statement that held deep implications for the district. Because the superintendent refocused the staff continuously upon the vision statement, it

became a communication tool for creating unity of purpose and shared values among the district as a means to support teaching and learning in the schools.

The systemic properties of the superintendent's vision and the interconnectedness of his leadership acts to guide and focus the activities of the district are clarified in the following statement made by a central office executive:

> It's not his title or your title that is going to reign here, it's the power of the idea. In it, the beliefs about the children, the belief of ownership and trust, and this interdependency of site-based decision-making and accountability all come together through this organizational focus. I think those are the four major things that are occurring in this system (INT 16:10:287-292; 297-300).

Act IV: Restructuring the District Organization

In describing recent studies of central office restructuring and reorganization, Bryk and associates (1998, p. 279) refer to "a new vision of central action" which "entails a renorming toward becoming advocates for local schools rather than acting as their superpatrons." Interviews with study participants revealed that among the factors contributing to low performance in the district prior to the entry of the new superintendent were a top-heavy, bureaucratic administration; a large span of control; ineffective supervision and support of instruction; and isolation of classroom teachers.

After an assessment of district operations, the superintendent determined the organizational structure to be an ineffective system for improving the district's condition of low performance. This assessment, along with the state mandate to

decentralize and the directive from TEA to correct the condition of low performance in the district, prompted the superintendent's decision to restructure the district organizational structure to make the system more responsive to campus needs. Because the superintendent was committed to improving student performance and providing equity and excellence for all children, it was of paramount importance to eliminate the barriers to those in greatest need — those who were in closest proximity to the students.

Strategies used by the superintendent to restructure the district organization included: reorganizing the central office; redefining the roles of all central office personnel, and creating systems of communication in the district. In reorganizing the central office, he flattened and downsized the organization for greater efficiency and reorganized the instructional divisions of central office to create four Assessment and Support teams. The mission of the Assessment and Support teams was to evaluate the performance of district campuses, beginning with those that were low-performing; to make recommendations for improvement; and to provide the necessary services, training, resources, and technical support to help them improve student performance. Data from all interviews indicated that campus and district academic performance improved as a direct result of the intervention and support from the Superintendent and from the Central office staff.

To enhance communication, a formalized structure for district meetings was developed to support communication, collaborative work cultures, and vertical and horizontal alignment within the district and among the campuses. In

addition to formal monthly meetings held with principals, the superintendent, and central office administrators, principals met with each other and Assessment and Support team leaders in horizontal and vertical meetings within each of the four feeder pattern areas of the district. All principals and central office administrators confirmed the value of these meetings to promote collaboration, professional development, and curriculum/instructional alignment across the district.

The superintendent's actions to restructure and reorganize central office in order to provide support and intervention in the schools were consistent with a systemic approach to reform (Elmore, 2002; O'Day & Smith, 1993). The purpose of the restructuring was to produce broad-based changes in teaching and learning across the entire school system, holding all schools accountable to the same standard, and shifting attention from the district to the school as the locus of performance (Elmore, 2002; Fuhrman, 1999). The actions resulted in improved performance at all campuses and high rates of performance across the district.

Act V: Decentralization of Authority/ Empowerment of District Campuses

Bryk and associates (1998) describe a new model of decentralization that occurs within a context of capacity-building and rigorous external accountability and that provides the *extra-school infrastructure* needed to promote improvement (279). Bryk et al. assert:

> Decentralization is based on the premise that the best accountability is not regulatory. While it may be necessary from time to time to use bureaucratic intervention in very troubled schools, the ultimate aim is a stronger base of professional norms of practice for educating all

children well…(p. 280).

When the state mandated decentralization, it was evident to the staff members that the superintendent interpreted the policy systemically — in relation to its counterpart policy, accountability, to the district vision of high expectations, and to the organizational focus on student performance. In analyzing the policy of decentralization, the superintendent determined that if principals were to be held accountable for the performance of their students and for meeting the district's performance expectations, they should have the freedom and authority to generate solutions to their own problems. Based on this interpretation, the superintendent devolved almost total authority and responsibility for budgets, personnel, and instruction, previously held by central office administrators, to the campus principals. Because there was no standardization of curriculum or district programs, principals were given almost total freedom and autonomy to generate diverse programmatic solutions to meet the needs of their students.

When the superintendent decentralized authority to the principals, he subsequently encouraged them to empower classroom teachers and their site-based management teams (CEICs). To promote successful implementation of site-based management, the district office developed policies, procedures, and programs of training to develop the leadership and decision-making skills of the professional staff. From the perspective of teacher, principals, and central office members, the authority to make decisions about the content and processes of instruction created a feeling of greater ownership and responsibility for the programs they selected.

Empowerment was also defined by those interviewed as the diverse capacity-building opportunities provided by the district — attention to the development and training needs of principals and teachers. Teachers and administrators alike referred to a host of professional development initiatives designed to build capacity and personal mastery within the district and to develop the leadership potential of the professional staff. According to participants, the attention and concern promoted feelings of worth and a culture of professionalism in the district.

In the empowered environment of professional development and shared decision-making, teachers and administrators in schools across the district reported the emergence of new collaborative work cultures in which teachers "opened their classroom doors" and exchanged ideas and strategies. Principals who were strong instructional leaders created environments where teachers became leaders, where learning was valued by professionals and modeled for students, and where a "collective sense of responsibility" for student success and school improvement developed. "Privacy of practice produces isolation; isolation is the enemy of improvement" (Elmore & Burney, 1999, p. 20)

Without exception, those interviewed agreed that the superintendent's interpretation and implementation of state-mandated decentralization policies set Mariposa ISD apart from other districts. From the reports of the respondents, the high level of empowerment for principals and teachers at the school site to make relevant educational decisions based on the campus needs, coupled with adequate resources and high levels of support from central office and the superintendent,

became powerful tools for achieving high performance in the district. A campus principal summarized the feelings expressed in all interviews:

> The things the superintendent let us control were so critical. The district provides you a supportive environment, and they allow you to control the factors of success. You get to hire the people you want, you get to train them in the manner you think is most effective, and then you have the money to put where you think the students will benefit the most. There is no excuse for principals and schools to not be successful in our district.

Act VI. Creating Systems of Accountability and Norms of Continuous Improvement

According to Bryk et al. (1998), "For improvement to occur, a system of rigorous accountability must be established that tracks the progress of school improvement efforts and that can intervene in failing situations" (p. 270); however it is central that this accountability operate in ways that advance, rather than undermine, local capacity-building (Bryk, et al., 1998).

Evidence from interviews indicated the superintendent used the state-mandated accountability system to leverage change and transform the district by creating an internal norms of accountability that linked closely with the external accountability policies of the state. The effectiveness of the district accountability system was credited by the staff not to the power of the policies themselves, but to the manner in which the superintendent interpreted and implemented them. The superintendent aligned internal and external accountability systems by linking employee performance expectations and contract renewal to student performance

results on state assessments and school accountability ratings. He created coherence and meaning for change by focusing all components of the system, including shared beliefs about children's learning; a vision of high expectations; organizational structures of support; and the interrelated reform policies of accountability and decentralization to a focus on equitable and excellent student performance (Fuhrman, 1999). The superintendent diffused accountability throughout the system by defining everyone's role in terms of increasing student performance.

While the pressure on principals and their teachers to improve student performance was great, the entire organization was focused on serving the needs of campus principals and on providing them systems of support to ensure school success. The superintendent's strategy to create Assessment and Support Teams was developed to provide both pressure and support to low-performing campuses to increase their scores.

The successful implementation of accountability in the district of Mariposa was credited to the superintendent's unique interpretation and implementation of accountability and site-based management as interdependent processes. Schools that increased their performance to meet district performance standards of "recognized" or "exemplary" performance levels, earned relative freedom and autonomy to manage their own affairs while schools with low performance ratings were subjected to careful monitoring, "shared decision-making," and intervention by central office teams. As gains in achievement occurred, the campuses regained relative amounts of autonomy from central

office intervention. Staff members understood the district's performance expectations and knew the consequences for failure to meet the standards of success. They expressed the belief that holding schools accountable was a fair system which proved them plenty of latitude to perform and which motivated high achievement gains. In describing the relationship between the policies of accountability and site-based management, one principal said: "You can't have site-based management without accountability. They have to go together. Site-based management without holding someone responsible is meaningless" (INT 19:30:670-675).

Those interviewed indicated that through attention to the vision, empowerment of people, high expectations, and clear accountability for student performance, the superintendent created a powerful dynamic in Mariposa that spurred innovation and led the district to norms of continuous improvement across the district. As the district became focused on performance and instruction, achievement subsequently increased. When one high poverty campus achieved "recognized" status, and experienced a taste of success, the staff awakened to the possibility that others could achieve similar results. The superintendent set such high goals for student performance that, as schools increased performance, the bar continued to be raised. One administrator said, "School improvement is a process, and we're never there!" As a final note, an elementary principal described the dynamic atmosphere of a district in forward motion:

> We have developed a culture of success. Our kids know they are smart. They expect to do well. Our teachers know the expectations are high, and

they expect to do well. The momentum that develops from this culture of success is like the law of physics: a body in motion tends to stay in motion, and a body at rest tends to stay at rest. We're in motion, and its fun. We're going to continue to go forward.

Conclusions

Based on this study the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. A variety of leadership behaviors are used by the superintendent to Influence change and improve performance in the school district. Broad leadership acts are used to achieve specific purposes in the district and school community and are supported by a variety of strategies to complete the acts of leadership. Leadership behaviors used by the superintendent in environments of reform vary, depending on context of the community and the pressures and needs for change both internal and external to the district. The leadership acts used by the superintendent may include establishing an agenda for change, transforming district culture, establishing a shared vision, restructuring the district organization, decentralizing authority to the campuses, and creating systems of accountability.

The superintendent use a variety of strategies to complete acts of leadership. Some of the strategies include identifying needs and pressures for change, both internal and external to the district, creating shared beliefs about student learning, setting high expectations and creating an organizational focus on performance; reorganizing the central office and changing the roles, responsibilities, and relationships of its membership; implementing site-based management and empowering campus personnel; monitoring performance and

enforcing consequences; linking policies of site-based management and accountability, and creating norms of continuous improvement.

2. The effectiveness of the superintendent's leadership acts and strategies are dependent on whether the purpose for the leadership behaviors was accomplished. In environments of accountability and state-initiated reform, the effectiveness of the leadership acts and strategies may be determined by whether student performance improved as a result of the leadership behavior. Successful implementation of externally-mandated state or federal reforms may be mediated by the superintendent's interpretations of the reform policies in relation to the context of the district. By virtue of his or her position, the superintendent may shape district response to the reform policies based on the manner in which the policies of reform are interpreted and the leadership behaviors chosen in response to the reform policies.

3. Student performance ratings and assessment results may be modified by the leadership behaviors of an effective superintendent. Reform can be brought to scale and virtually all students achieve at high levels in districts where high poverty and high minority populations are predominant, especially in environments which nurture shared beliefs about the abilities of all children to succeed. Strong decentralized systems of technical support for low-performing campuses appear to contribute to improved academic performance of those schools. High achievement can occur in all schools across a high-poverty school district when policies of decentralization are implemented within the context of high expectations for student performance, capacity building, and coherent

systems of external and internal accountability. Multiple approaches to instruction can co-exist successfully in a high-performing school district when the leader decentralizes authority to district campuses and employs leadership acts and strategies to employ site-based management, empowerment, and accountability.

Implications

In today's era of federal and state-initiated reform and accountability, school district leaders are mandated to create environments of equity in their school districts that are receptive to the forces of change. As the chief executive officer of school districts, superintendents play a critical role in environments of reform to interpret and shape the responses to policy in relation to the context and culture of their school districts. Based on the findings of this study, there are implications for superintendents in creating the organizational conditions that will ensure academic success for all children and in leveraging the forces of change in order to bring reform to scale throughout their districts.

The superintendent bears the responsibility for providing leadership to establish vision, purpose, and meaning as a precondition for change (Fullan, 2001). The leader serves as a source of information, support and advocacy to guide the district to assess the need for change, to interpret the policies of reform, and to plan an appropriate plan for change. Effective leaders recognize that change is contextual — what works in one setting may be ineffective in another. Therefore, interpretation of policies and the plan for implementation must be developed in relation to the cultural content of the community and the pressing

needs of students and staff. Further, the superintendent must identify the resources to support the reform and market the plan to the school community.

Superintendents facilitate district-wide improvement and equitable environments of learning for all children, by creating and nurturing a vision of student success and an organizational focus on student performance, directing all activities toward improving student learning for all children. To develop an organizational focus on performance, the superintendent engages the staff in developing shared beliefs about learning within the organization. He or she sets high expectations for student and staff performance and creates coherent mechanisms to hold people accountable to those expectations. In an environment of equity, all schools and students must be expected to meet those standards. As the organizational leader, the superintendent spends time communicating a sense of urgency and continually refocusing people on the vision of school success.

Recognizing that it is unlikely that schools will respond successfully to the external demands for accountability without a coherent internal system of accountability, superintendents must interpret and implement the policies of reform with a systemic approach to change. In systemic change, all the components of restructuring are connected coherently with each other to become focused on improving teaching and learning in the schools. Within a framework of accountability and high expectations, effective superintendents create systems of support and capacity-building to ensure school success. Elmore and Burney (1998) describe a process of district *reculturing* in which the system develops with a focus on instruction, meaning, capacity, and coherence. The

superintendent restructures the organization to focus on schools and principals, and support them with the technical assistance, systems of communication and resources they need to improve.

It is the job of the leader to increase the capacity of the organization to support change. To build capacity for change, the leader must set in motion the processes to connect employees with sources of information outside the workplace and to each other within the workplace to exchange ideas and to create cultures of learning within the schools (Elmore, 2002; Fuhrman, 1999). Improvement across entire systems demands an environment that guides and directs the acquisition of new knowledge about instruction (Elmore, 2000, p. 20)

Restructuring and reform across entire school districts requires transforming leadership. Leaders shape the goals and values in their school districts by establishing norms of collaboration and continuous improvement in their organizations. Through collaboration and communication staff members develop a sense of ownership, professionalism, and a commitment to shared goals. To create high-performing organizations, effective leaders decentralize decision-making to those closest to the students, empower staff with the authority and freedom to determine relevant solutions to increase school success, support them with appropriate resources, and held them accountable for results.

The job of the leader, then, is to create understanding of the plan for restructuring, to enhance the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, holding the various pieces of the organization together in a productive

relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result (Elmore, 2000).

Recommendations for Further Research

The literature addressing the superintendent's leadership of state-initiated reform is limited. Given the limitations of a single case study to provide opportunities for generalization, it is recommended that the subject of effective leadership practices used by superintendents in environments of reform be investigated in other successful districts of comparable size, demographics, and characteristics.

Since this study was conducted in a large, urban school Texas school district where the majority of students were poor, studies are needed to explore the leadership strategies and acts used by superintendents in small school districts, in rural settings, in settings where students are more affluent, and in other states where the policies of reform may vary. Additionally, since the unit of analysis for this study was a male superintendent, the study of leadership behaviors of female superintendents may be useful.

Another important recommendation for additional research would be to examine the sustainability of the district's transformation and its high performance over time, particularly after a change in leadership. Although this topic was not addressed in this study, an area of research to be considered is the influence of the superintendent-school board relationship to the sustainability of performance and to the continuity of the restructuring plan.

Appendix A

Agreement to Participate Letter

Coordinator of Research, Testing, and Evaluation
Mariposa ISD
(Date)

Dear (Coordinator of Research, Testing, and Evaluation):

The purpose of this letter is to request the participation of your district in identifying executive leadership behaviors influential in creating and sustaining high achieving, high poverty schools. By participating in this study, the school district will contribute to research that will highlight the characteristics of effective superintendent leadership that influences student achievement in high poverty schools. If you agree to participate in the research study, you are committing to the following:

I would like to schedule two visits in November, 1998 and two additional visits through March, 1999. The visits and interviews will be scheduled through your office. I am interested in conducting interviews with members of the central office staff, campus principals, and teachers. All of the data collection will be conducted in a manner that causes minimal interference to the operation of schools.

The results of this study will be disseminated in a variety of formats to enable other educators in Texas to benefit from the experiences, knowledge, and expertise of the district.

Should you agree to participate in this research, please sign the "Agreement to Participate" form below. If you have questions regarding the study, please contact Charlotte Parramore at _____ or use e-mail: charlotte.parramore@esc.13.txed.net.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Charlotte Parramore
Graduate Student
The University of Texas at Austin

Agreement to Participate

This is to affirm that the _____ Independent School District is willing to participate in the dissertation study focused on identifying superintendent leadership behaviors influential in creating and sustaining high achieving, high poverty schools.

_____ _____

Signature of Coordinator Date

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a study of the superintendent's leadership of reform in the _____ISD. My name is Charlotte Parramore. I am a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin in the Educational Administration Department and a fellow in the twelfth cycle of the Cooperative Superintendency Program. This research project is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my doctoral dissertation.

The purpose of my research is to examine the strategies and leadership practices used by the superintendent to initiate and leverage reform and to understand how these strategies and practices influence student performance. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you hold the position of _____ and have been an employee in this district over the past five years.

If you decide to participate, I will interview you using an open-ended questionnaire. The interview will be audio taped over a period of approximately one hour. The taped interview will then be transcribed and coded. At the conclusion of the study, the audiotapes will be destroyed. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Data collection for this study will take place between October, 1998 and January 1999.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your future relations with The University of Texas at Austin. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time. If you have questions during my visit, please ask me. If questions arise at a later time, you may contact Dr. Martha N. Ovando, my faculty sponsor, or myself at the address listed below. Enclosed is an additional copy of this form for you to keep.

Charlotte Parramore
17012 Cactus Blossom Drive
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512/919-5200
charlotte.parramore@esc13.txed.net

Dr. Martha N. Ovando
Graduate Advisor
The University of Texas at Austin
George I. Sanchez Bldg., Rm. 37
Department of Educational Administration
Austin, TX 78712-1291
Movando@mail.utexas.edu

I agree to participate in this study and give my permission for the interviews to be tape-recorded.

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

Appendix C

Interview Protocols*

*Modified as necessary for principals, teachers, central office administrators.

Name: _____ Date: _____

School: _____ Time: _____

Introduction of research project presented to interviewee.

Background Information:

1. Describe your background education.

2. Describe your professional history with Mariposa ISD.

Restructuring

3. Describe the conditions in the district prior to restructuring in 1992?

4. In your opinion, what factors in the state, district, schools, and community served as the catalyst for the decision by district leadership to restructure?

5. Describe some of the significant changes and events over the last six years that have led the district to success.

6. What have been some of the district's greatest challenges?

7. What has changed about teaching and learning as a result of the districts' decision to restructure?

8. Give an example of a recent decision affecting student achievement in which you have been involved.

Leadership

9. Who are the district leaders? Describe the role of district leadership in the change process.

10. What are the leadership acts and leadership strategies employed by the superintendent in response to state-initiated reforms?

Accountability

11. How are teachers held accountable?

12. How are district administrators held accountable?

13. Where do you see your district now? What are the next steps in the continuous improvement process?

14. Is there anything else you would like to share?

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